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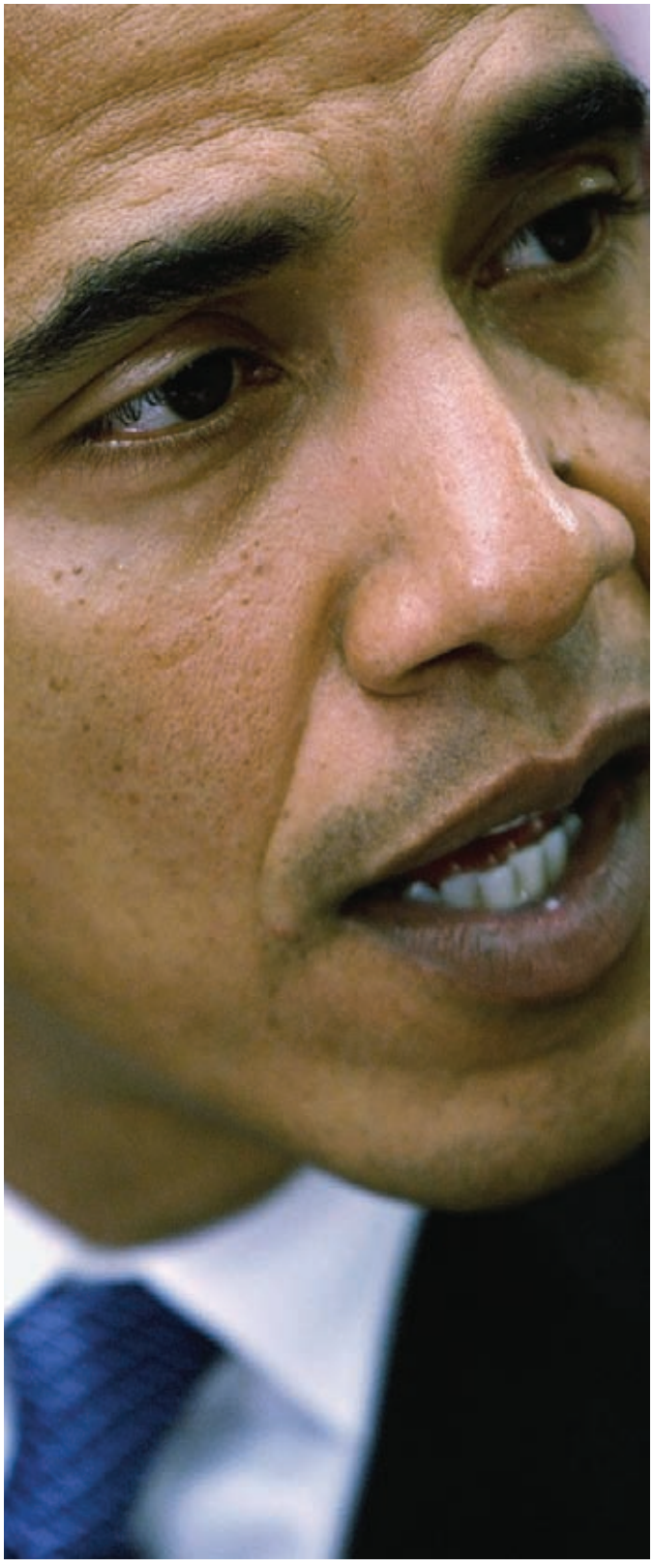

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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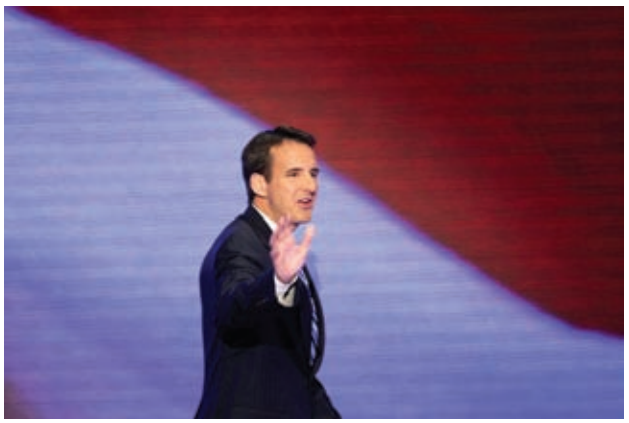
VOLUME 240 WASHINGTON, MAY 6, 2009 NUMBER 4,858

The Hundredth Senator

Does Tim Pawlenty have what it takes to be president? We may know the answer to that question surprisingly soon. Even before he wound up on John McCain's short list of potential running mates last summer, the 48-year-old Minnesota governor was being hailed as the sort of Republican who could reverse the national GOP's steep decline. With his working-class roots (his father was a truck driver) and unorthodox conservatism (he'd just as quickly bash pharmaceutical companies as praise them), Pawlenty seems uniquely suited to appeal to independent voters, who in recent years have favored Democrats. It's little wonder that he's said to be seriously considering a run for the White House in 2012.



DANIEL ACKER/BLOOMBERG NEWS/LANDOV

Which is why Pawlenty is about to come to a political crossroads. In a matter of weeks, the Minnesota Supreme Court will almost certainly uphold a three-judge panel's determination that Al Franken beat Norm Coleman in last November's U.S. Senate race by 312 votes. Coleman has indicated that he will likely challenge the expected ruling in federal court. And Pawlenty, as Minnesota's governor, will face a decision: Does he certify Franken's election and fill Minnesota's second Senate seat? Or does he refuse to sign Franken's certificate of election, without which the Senate refuses to seat him, until Coleman has fought and—according to the predictions of most legal minds not in Coleman's direct employ—inevitably lost his case in the federal courts?

As a matter of Pawlenty's political self-interest, the benefits of the latter would seem obvious. With Republicans anxious to deny Democrats a 59th vote in the Senate for as long as humanly possible, Pawlenty could give himself a leg up in the 2012 primaries by refusing to seat Franken until Coleman's federal suit is resolved—something that National Republican Senatorial Committee chairman John Cornyn has predicted could take "years." Indeed, if congressional Republicans are successful in thwarting any of President Obama's first-term agenda, Pawlenty would be able to plausibly claim credit. Plenty of successful presidential campaigns have been built on less.

As a matter of political principle, however, Pawlenty will have to send Franken to Washington. Up until now, he has been on solid legal footing in not signing Franken's certificate. Minnesota election law doesn't allow a certificate to be issued until any legal challenge to that election is resolved. But, after the state Supreme Court rules on Coleman's appeal, Pawlenty will have little choice. In an abundance of caution, he could ask the Senate to seat Franken provisionally, in the unlikely event that Coleman's federal suit succeeds (something the Senate did for Mary Landrieu while a legal challenge to her 1996 victory in Louisiana wound its way through the courts). But, if Pawlenty doesn't sign the certificate, he will not only be acting counter to the intent of the state Supreme Court, he'll be denying Minnesotans their constitutional right to dual representation in the U.S. Senate—something they haven't had since early January.

That's why, as eager as Republicans in Washington are for the Coleman-Franken legal fight to drag on, voters in Minnesota want it to end. According to a poll taken the day after the three-judge panel roundly rejected Coleman's challenge, 63 percent of Minnesotans believe Coleman should concede the race, and, barring that, 59 percent favor Pawlenty signing the certificate that will send Franken to Washington and finally give the state two senators. As the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*, which endorsed Coleman, put it in a recent editorial urging a speedy resolution to the Coleman-Franken battle: "Two voices are better than one when it comes to securing federal funding for Minnesota projects, or representing this state's particular perspective on issues ranging from health care to immigration to military and veterans' affairs." While it's far too common for politicians to ignore their constituents while they run for the White House—Barack Obama, for instance, missed 64 percent of Senate votes in 2008—Pawlenty would be taking this practice to a whole new level if he put his own presidential ambitions above Minnesotans' interests.

What's more, it's far from clear that such a move would actually serve those ambitions. Pawlenty's calling card up until now has been that he is a different kind of Republican—more "Sam's Club" than "country club," as he's put it. And that's a good brand to have these days. While diehard Republicans might hail Pawlenty for flouting the law and failing to represent his constituents, those diehards are becoming an ever-smaller part of the electorate: A recent Pew poll found that about one-quarter of the population identifies as Republican, down from one-third in 2004. The way forward for Pawlenty—and the GOP—lies in demonstrating that his party is not an irrelevant, balkanized rump. By seating Franken, Pawlenty could do just that. ◆

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Night of the Living Bushies

Karl Rove wanders the night in search of vindication.

JONATHAN CHAIT

THE DEPICTION of Barack Obama that has emerged from some quarters of the American right is that of a Bush-like figure. He is irresponsibly running up deficits and covering them up with budgetary gimmickry. Under the guise of healing rhetoric, he ruthlessly pressures fellow partisans in Congress to toe the line. He is "filling White House ranks with former lobbyists," and his administration is degenerating into general incompetence. And he has given unprecedented, Rove-like power to his political Svengali, David Axelrod. Oddly enough, the author of all these particular criticisms is Rove himself.

A similar portrait of Obama has emerged from the pens of Michael Gerson, the former Bush speechwriter, and Peter Wehner, Bush's former "director of strategic initiatives," a job that essentially entailed coordinating GOP agitprop. The Bush veterans have systematically discovered that every flaw associated in the public mind with their hero turns out to be a defining trait of Obama. I am not a trained psychologist, but some form of projection seems to be at work.

A couple of weeks ago, a Pew poll found that the partisan gap in President Obama's approval rating had reached a historic high. Rove leaped to point to this scrap of data ("no president in the past 40 years has done more to polarize America"), as did Gerson and Wehner. The concept of a polarized electorate assumes some rough parity between the two parties and a president hovering around 50 percent approval—as was the case with Bush around the time of his reelection, when the press would routinely describe him as "polarizing." Obama's low approval rating among Republicans is mostly a function of the fact that the party has shrunk to a pungent, highly conservative core. Pew found that about a quarter of the population identifies as Republican, down from one-third in 2004.

Yet the fine points of public opinion are not what interested the Bush veterans. What mattered was that another of the smears against their great leader had, seemingly, been turned on its head. The Bushies greeted Obama with the expectation that he would realize at last how well the 43rd president served his country. ("The closer you come to the Oval Office," writes Gerson, "the wiser your predecessors appear.") Obama's failure to arrive at this conclusion infuriates them. (Rove: "The new president's jabs at Mr. Bush have been unceasing, unfair and unhelpful.")

But, in the present climate of public opinion, direct defenses of Bush have limited appeal, so the Bushies mainly argue by implication.

Rove, as one would imagine, goes about his task in the bluntest manner, elevating shamelessness to a kind of performance art. He clucks disapprovingly that "senior White House staff meet for two hours each Wednesday evening to digest their latest polling and focus-group research." The man who described the liberal reaction to September 11 as "offer[ing] therapy and understanding for our attackers" now sadly says that Obama "routinely ascribes to others' views they don't espouse." There's nothing unusual about political hacks becoming hack pundits, but you didn't find, say, James Carville on CNN accusing George W. Bush of sexually exploiting White House interns.

Gerson, the former speechwriter, takes a more subtle tack. In his *Washington Post* column, he has carved out a persona as a hopeful but inevitably disappointed friend of the Obama administration. In Gerson's rather idiosyncratic telling, the public voted him into office in the hope that he would govern as a status quo caretaker. "Obama," he wrote, "appealed to a nation weary of large national exertions—a nation longing for a normality beyond the wars, hurricanes, floods, and assorted plagues of the Bush years." And yet, despite the fact that the public liked everything about the Bush years except the weather, Obama has insisted on changing things. "It is a sad, unnecessary shame," Gerson laments, "that Barack Obama, the candidate of unity, has so quickly become another source of division."

One of the lessons the Bush veterans took away from the previous eight years is that governing is hard. Wehner is particularly fond of warning his successors of the task before them. "If Obama and the Democrats do sweep to victory on Tuesday," he wrote before the election, "they will discover that running a campaign is a lot easier than running a country." Wehner has made this same governing-is-hard point at least a half-dozen times since. After all, if the challenges of governing could best a giant like George W. Bush, they could best anybody.

In anticipation of his prophecy coming true, his blogging for *Commentary* has become a gleeful chronicle of Obama's imagined descent into dysfunction and popular repudiation. A very partial sample:

> *January 7:* So Barack Obama has not yet been sworn in and the 111th Congress has been in power for all of a day, and both are beginning to slip on banana peels. . . .
> *February 3:* The famously smooth running, No-Drama-Obama Team is rapidly becoming an Abbott and Costello routine. . . .
> *February 11:* Right now President Obama and his team look at times amateurish and somewhat overmatched by events. . . .
> *February 20:* Obama has sent of jolt of energy through the GOP, which is in far stronger shape than anyone could have imagined just a month ago. . . .
> *March 3:* And one can start to feel the country's perception of Obama beginning to shift, day-by-day, a few degrees at a time. Hope and joy are being replaced by fear and uncertainty. . . .
> *March 4:* It's amazing how quickly a formidable political figure, in the midst of a crisis he (so far) seems unable to confront, can go tone deaf. . . .
> *March 9:* [R]ight now our President looks to be over-matched by events. . . .
> *March 13:* His support, rather than congealing, is weakening.

In actual reality, Obama's approval rating has held steady at around 60 percent for more than a month, and the public trusts Democrats over Republicans by massive margins. Perhaps Obama is benefitting from the contrast with his predecessor. Governing *is* hard. But governing better than George W. Bush is actually pretty easy. ◆

TRB
From Washington

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The Mall

Underground Man

Where in the world is Matt Drudge?

On the morning of June 7, 2008, Matt Drudge showed up at the National Building Museum in Washington, where Hillary Clinton was scheduled to give her concession speech. At the entrance, Drudge found his host, Tracy Sefl, a Clinton campaign staffer who, the day before, had offered to meet Drudge at the event. Throughout the campaign, Sefl had served as the Clintons' preferred back channel to communicate with the mercurial operator of the *Drudge Report*. Both sides benefited from the arrangement: The Clinton camp could push favorable items into the news cycle, and Drudge would receive the inevitable traffic boost that accompanied anything Hillary-related. (As Drudge himself once quipped on his radio show: "I need Hillary Clinton. You don't get it. I need to be part of her world. That's my bank.")

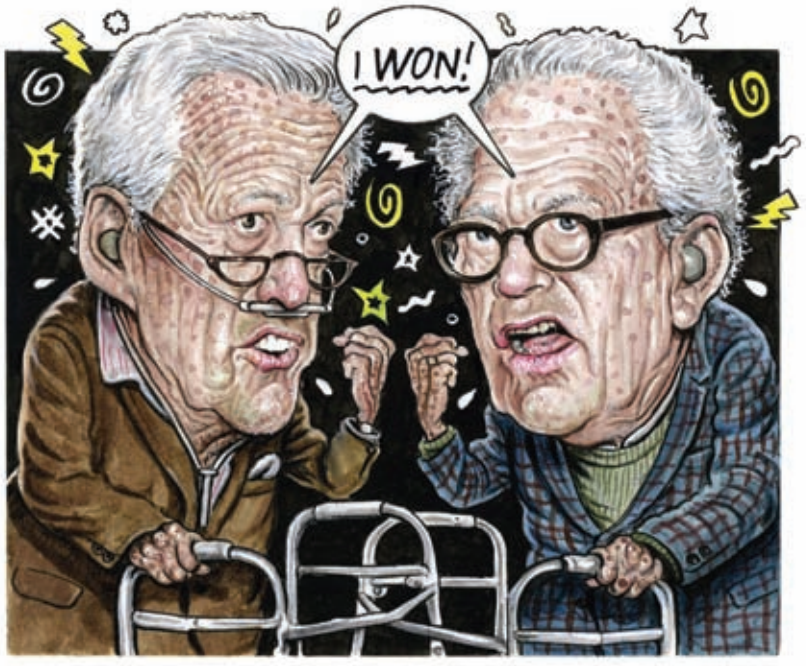
While thousands of Hillary supporters streamed into the hall, Drudge and Sefl stood chatting off to the side and waited for Clinton to take the podium. Soon, word leaked out that Drudge was somewhere in the room, and Sefl's BlackBerry lit up with frantic e-mails from reporters hoping to gain an audience. "Are you really there with him?" one national political reporter wrote. "Will you introduce me? Is it true? Can I come meet you?" e-mailed another.

Their excitement was understandable. A decade after he burst onto the national scene during the Monica Lewinsky scandal, Drudge remains one of the most powerful figures in journalism. In the Web 2.0 era—with media outlets unveiling increasingly complex sites that feature multiple avenues for readers to contribute, from comments to Tweets—the *Drudge Report* doesn't look like much: just an old-fashioned layout consisting mostly of links to articles in other publications, alongside the occasional breaking news story of its own. And yet, because it draws up to 20 million hits per day—and, more importantly, because it is read religiously by Washington's reporters, political operatives, and cable news producers—the site retains a striking ability to dictate what appears in the mainstream press. Indeed, one of journalism's unofficial parlor games these days consists of mining Drudge's site for clues to his proclivities—so that one might figure out how to gain his favor and earn a valuable link.

Drudge owes both his stature and his accompanying fortune—sources believe he makes millions per year off his site—essentially to one thing: his appetite, during the Lewinsky era and afterward, for rummaging further into the lives of public figures than mainstream journalists were willing to go. And that's ironic when you consider the reason that his appearance at the Clinton concession speech created such a frenzy: For the past few years, Matt Drudge has gone almost completely underground.

He may always have been an outsider in Washington, but, early in his career, Drudge at least tolerated the spotlight as he built his franchise. In June 1998, at the height of the Lewinsky scandal, he delivered an infamous speech at the National Press Club in which he placed himself in the tradition of John Peter Zenger. In June 2001, shortly after moving to Florida, he agreed to be profiled by the *Miami New Times*. And, in 2005, I met Drudge at the Bloomberg after-party following the White House Correspon-

WHITE HOUSE WATCH *With* **DREW FRIEDMAN**



In the fall of 2035, the Coleman-Franken contest remains unsettled.

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dents Dinner. Decked out in his trademark fedora, a scrum of eager reporters surrounding him, he seemed to be lapping up the attention.

But, since then, even while continuing to update his site constantly, Drudge has almost completely disappeared from public life. As far as I can tell, the Clinton event was his only public appearance of the past few years. In September 2007, he gave up his Sunday evening radio show, which had long been his most visible platform. Some of the politicos he once regularly contacted now say he is in touch less frequently. One source relays that, these days, the only media figures he talks to regularly are a select group that includes Rush Limbaugh, Ann Coulter, and Andrew Breitbart, the conservative blogger who has helped run the *Drudge Report* on a part-time basis. (Also working on the site has been Kevin Lucido, who runs the Vienna, Virginia–based ad firm Intermarkets and sells Drudge's advertising.)

For several years, Drudge lived in a condo at the Four Seasons in Miami. In August 2007, the *Los Angeles Times* published a front-page piece that reported on his residence there. "The luxury condos are located on the upper floors of the 70-story building, the tallest in Florida, and offer a dazzling view of Biscayne Bay through floor-to-ceiling windows," the *Times* reported. "Live-ins like Drudge have full access to the hotel's amenities, including a 50,000-square-foot spa and sports club, three pools, and daily maid service." Drudge now lives at another property in Miami, according to a friend. "Reporters' means have been questionable," the friend told me. (The *Times* reporter had a concierge slip a note under his door.)

When he's not in Miami, Drudge spends considerable time traveling—for instance, to Tel Aviv, Geneva, and Las Vegas, according to multiple sources. "He's totally portable," Drudge's friend Lucianne Goldberg told me. "He's like a turtle—he takes it with him." Says the other friend, "He has turned me on to a healthy appreciation for good hotels." Still, the pressures to maintain the site while traveling can be crushing. "It's a really fucked-up life. It's not necessarily fun," this friend explains. "He lives his job. It's with him always."

What is driving Drudge to seclusion? Those who know him say that part of the reason he has disappeared from public view is that he is so bothered by the media's prurient interest in his personal life. "He wants no part of a lot of this," the friend told me. "He sees it as nonsense. He doesn't have respect for the way people have tried to write about him." Indeed, this April, he e-mailed a quote to *New York* magazine after the gay publication *Out* placed him on its list of the country's 50 most powerful gays and lesbians. (*Out* claimed that he "love[s] Chaka Khan, 'The Young and the Restless,' and sex with men," and that "his agenda is often anti-gay, anti-choice, and anti-tolerance.")

"False. False. False. I do not love sex with men," he told *New York*'s Chris Rovzar. "My site is not anti-gay. I present both sides of the anti-choice-life issue. I am not anti-tolerant! Except against big-government freaks. I *liked* Chaka in the eighties, and have not watched 'Young and the Restless' in twenty years! But I *do* watch 'Judge Judy'!"

One source relayed to me that, a couple of years ago, Limbaugh advised Drudge to disappear from public life. (Limbaugh declined to comment.) Perhaps Limbaugh, whose personal life has received a thorough public airing over the years, understood the toll this could take. Perhaps he was trying to protect a fellow conservative from attack by the left. Or maybe he simply grasped something that now appears very obvious: Matt Drudge owes his power in part to the air of mystery that surrounds him.

"I don't know what the fuck is going on with him," one exasperated magazine editor, who had been in contact with Drudge frequently, told me. "Maybe I've talked to him once in the past six months. Even with e-mails, I don't get a response from the dude. We used to go back and forth [on Instant Messenger]. The last phone call I got, which was months ago, I said, 'What is going on with the whole Howard Hughes thing?' He started laughing. He said something like, 'I don't need to go out there and talk.'" And it's true: He doesn't.

Gabriel Sherman

ANTHONY RUSSO

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Freeh Fall

A former FBI director and his princely benefactor.

During his tenure as FBI director, Louis J. Freeh struggled to raise a family of eight on a government salary. By the time he stepped down in 2001, his house was heavily mortgaged and he could be seen flying in coach class. Since leaving the Bureau, however, Freeh has earned a handsome salary. He first spent several years as a top lawyer for the credit-card giant MBNA before opening his own firm in 2007, Freeh Group International, which bills itself as "a global consulting enterprise," specializing in advising a "select" group of (mostly undisclosed) clients on the niceties of international accounting and anti-corruption laws.

In the grand scheme of post-government careers, this might not seem so extraordinary were it not for one remarkable member of Freeh's "select" clients: Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the former Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States. Currently accused of illegally siphoning as much as $2 billion from a Saudi-British arms deal, Bandar has hired Freeh as his lawyer.

The two are an unlikely pair. Freeh is a character from the *Untouchables*—an altar boy from New Jersey. Bandar is a large-living billionaire and an ex–fighter pilot. He is also a Washington legend: a friend to multiple presidents, CIA directors, and media giants, as well as a renowned broker of Middle Eastern realpolitik. Bandar's adult life has been about moving in the shadows. Freeh's has been about shining a light into the shadows. The story of how the G-man and the prince came to be friends and then business associates is a story about terrorism, politics, money—and hidden Washington machinations.

Our heartwarming tale of friendship begins in terror. On June 25, 1996, a truck bomb exploded outside the Khobar Towers complex housing U.S. military personnel in Saudi Arabia. The attack killed 19 U.S. soldiers and wounded 372. Dispatching hundreds of his agents to Saudi Arabia, Freeh took an almost fanatical personal stake in the case, meeting for hours with the families of the slain soldiers near a scale model of the devastated building, complete with faux bomb crater. "The meetings lasted three days, and I was there for every moment of them and every meal: morning, noon and night," Freeh recalled in his 2005 memoir, *My FBI*.

But Freeh quickly grew frustrated with the Saudis' refusal to grant his men full access to several arrested suspects, and arranged a meeting with Bandar, the one Saudi official he knew, albeit faintly. From the start, Freeh was keen to develop a relationship. "I had come alone," he wrote, "because I felt the more the prince and I could put matters on a personal footing, the greater progress we would make, now and in the future." Bandar pledged to cooperate.

And Freeh left the meeting a little smitten. His memoir introduces the ambassador-prince as a man "who lives at the crest of diplomatic and political society," and "practically has his own key to the Oval Office." His parties were "legendary" and his political analysis "excellent." A friendship soon blossomed. Bandar would drop by Freeh's office, where he alone was permitted to smoke cigars. Freeh, in turn, would visit Bandar at his McLean, Virginia compound, which featured a 38-room home and a 12-bedroom dormitory for staff. On visits to the kingdom, Freeh would dine with the royals. At one dinner in Riyadh, Freeh recalls how "the elegant Saudi ambassador"—that would be Bandar—"reached his well-manicured hand into a roast baby camel's rump, drew out a fistful of meat, and deposited it on my plate—a great honor."

Despite Bandar's pledge of help, the Saudis still didn't grant the FBI access to the suspects, who were telling their captors that they had been directed and trained by the Iranians. One reason for the obstructionism was Saudi *sharia* law, which bars foreigners from questioning criminal suspects. But the Saudis were also afraid of the consequences that might follow a U.S. retaliatory strike against Iran. To Freeh, however, the biggest obstacle to cooperation was President Bill Clinton—a judgment that meshed with his well-established loathing for the president's slippery fundraising and infidelities. (In 2001, Freeh sent a letter to Kenneth Starr hailing his "uncompromising . . . integrity.")

According to Freeh's narrative, Clinton and his deputies feared being drawn into a confrontation with Iran at a time when they were seeking a rapprochement with its new reformist president. "It soon became clear," Freeh later complained in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, "that Mr. Clinton and his national security advisor, Sandy Berger, had no interest in confronting the fact that Iran had blown up the towers. "

Freeh's memoir captured this purported spinelessness with a headline-grabbing scene: Meeting with Crown Prince Abdullah at Washington's Hay-Adams hotel, Clinton was scripted to press the Saudis for greater cooperation. But Freeh's book alleges that the president took a dive. Clinton "briefly raised the subject . . . only to tell the Crown Prince that he certainly understood the Saudis' reluctance to cooperate. Then, according to my sources, he hit Abdullah up for a contribution to the still-to-be built Clinton presidential library." Freeh, who wasn't present, hangs the scene on "usually reliable sources." But the press picked up on his shocking accusation: Bill Clinton sold his integrity for Saudi dollars.

David Cowles

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You deserve a factual look at . . .

The New Anti-Semitism

Who are its advocates? What are its goals?

The Holocaust, in which over six million Jews were brutally murdered by the Nazis and their enthusiastic collaborators, happened over 60 years ago. So terrific were the events that – even today, about two generations later – nobody would wish to identify himself with them. Yet, a new anti-Semitism is now rearing its head. It is important to be aware of it.

What are the facts?

Who are the new anti-Semites? The new anti-Semites do not publicly proclaim their desire to bring about a second Holocaust or to subject the Jews to mass murder or annihilation. The hatred is aimed against the state of Israel, which, according to the new anti-Semites, represents all that is evil in the world and which is the main violator of human rights and guilty of virtually every other abuse that can be conceived. This poison is now so widespread that a poll taken in Europe not too long ago found Israel to be the greatest menace to the peace of the world – far ahead of such murderous regimes as those of Iran or of North Korea.

> "...the viciousness, volume and consistency of this criticism against Israel is such that it cannot be considered as anything but anti-Semitism..."

The leaders and instigators of this new anti-Semitism are concentrated on the political left, its most active and vocal spokesmen being found in our prestige universities. Such is the anti-Zionist (anti-Semitic) focus of the left that, almost incomprehensibly, it includes a fair number of Jewish professors and other "intellectuals," not just here in the United States, but even in Israel itself.

Those on the extreme left call for the abolition of the State of Israel outright, although they do not tell us what they propose to do with the five million Israeli Jews. They would presumably be left to the tender mercies of the Arabs, who would, of course, have no greater joy than to emulate or perhaps even to "improve" on the Nazi model and to give "final solution(!) to the Jewish problem" once and for all. That isn't going to happen, of course, not because anybody in the world would lift a finger to prevent it, but because, fortunately, Israel is a very strong and most capable nation.

A death wish for Israel. In deference to "world opinion" and also to the wishes of the United States, Israel has allowed itself to be pressured into innumerable concessions to those who are sworn to destroy it. But it seems clear that, when the chips are really down, a most decisive response on the part of Israel can be expected. With the possible exception of Carthage during the Punic Wars, almost 2500 years ago, no country in the world, no country in recorded history, has ever been threatened with extinction. Israel is the one exception. Fueled by the extreme left, the "legitimacy" of Israel is a constant topic of discussion. The abolition of the "Zionist entity" gets serious attention, even in the hallowed halls of the United Nations. Iran feverishly pursues the Holy Grail of atomic weapons. Its president has publicly declared – not once, but repeatedly – that Israel is a "tumor" that must be excised and that it must be wiped off the map of the world. Medium-range missiles (so far, fortunately without atomic warheads) are being paraded through the streets of Teheran, with signs attached to them, shamelessly giving their destination as Jerusalem. A few eyebrows are being raised around the world, but otherwise nothing is being done about it.

Because the memory of the Nazi Holocaust still lingers after all these years, the new anti-Semitism is disguised as the socially more acceptable "anti-Zionism." It is pursued and propagated by the radical left. Every leftist demonstration – be it about the war in Iraq, against globalization, for or against whatever else – does inevitably include appeals against "Israeli subjugation of the Palestinians," the "occupation of Palestinian lands by Israel," or simply asks for the elimination of Israel. Sadly, quite a few Jews, having been saturated with leftism from their early years, participate in such demonstrations.

While the propagation of the new anti-Semitism by prestige universities started in Europe (mostly in England), it has found fertile ground in the universities of the United States. The active participation in the new anti-Semitism by the American clergy (beginning with the Presbyterians) is a scandalous reality.

Surely, not everybody who criticizes Israel is an anti-Semite. The actions of Israel, just as the actions of any other countries, are subject to examination and criticism. But the viciousness, volume and consistency of this criticism against Israel is such that it cannot be considered as anything but anti-Semitism – the new anti-Semitism, disguised as anti-Israelism or anti-Zionism. The foolish professors and the hypocritical preachers are besotted by their leftism and by their hatred against Israel and America. Overt vilification of America has to remain muted – it's somewhat dangerous to be too outspoken about it – but Israel, perceived as the satrap and the handmaiden of the United States in the Middle East, is an easy target. Nobody should be fooled. Anti-Semitism is anti-Semitism in whichever way it may be disguised.

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Numerous Clintonites vehemently disputed this account of the meeting. And, in their version, it was Freeh who succumbed to a Saudi prince, in this case Bandar. A gumshoe trained in mafia cases, Freeh was no match for the slick geopolitical deal-maker. "Louis Freeh was fed a bill of goods by Bandar," says a former senior Clinton administration official. The Clintonites felt sure that Bandar never shared Freeh's passion for justice—and that he exploited his proximity to Freeh to buy cover for Saudi intransigence. Top Clinton officials, including Sandy Berger, concluded that Bandar was making demands of the Americans that he knew to be unreasonable. Bandar, for instance, allegedly pressed the White House to say in advance how it would respond to hard information about Iran that the FBI might extract from the bombing suspects, something Berger and others adamantly refused to do. "Bandar was playing a game to avoid giving us the access," says the former Clintonite.

One also wonders what Freeh may have been thinking privately at the time. He is, after all, hardly the first senior U.S. official to wind up on the Saudi dole after leaving government. It has become shamefully routine for former U.S. ambassadors to Saudi Arabia to land on the kingdom's payroll. "If the reputation … builds that the Saudis take care of friends when they leave office, you'd be surprised how much better friends you have who are just coming into office," Bandar once quipped, according to *The Washington Post*.

Bandar now needs his friend Freeh more than ever. In June 2007, British press reports, citing UK officials, alleged that a huge 1985 fighter-jet deal that Bandar brokered between Saudi Arabia and Great Britain featured secret clauses in which the prince received roughly $2 billion in payments from the giant British arms company BAE Systems. Bandar denies the charge, saying that the money went to Saudi government accounts as a legal fee. But prosecutors say the accounts were effectively for Bandar's personal use. One payment came in the form of an Airbus 340 jet, ostensibly for official use, but which Bandar had painted in the blue-and-silver colors of his beloved Dallas Cowboys and has used for extensive personal travel.

Here the story takes a particularly disturbing turn. With British prosecutors bearing down in 2006, Bandar allegedly made a personal visit to Prime Minister Tony Blair. In that meeting, according to an official 2007 House of Lords report, Bandar delivered a threat from the Saudi royal family to cut off cooperation with the United Kingdom on counterterrorism if the case delved into the royals' Swiss bank accounts. Fearing the worst, Blair buckled. The British ambassador to Riyadh warned London prosecutors that "British lives … would be at risk" if the investigation continued, the report said. Freeh, so fulsomely indignant at the idea that Bill Clinton would compromise a terrorism investigation for political or financial reasons, now appears untroubled by evidence that Bandar did the same thing—only worse, insofar as Bandar's threat involved the specter of future violence.

Last week, Freeh made his first public appearance on Bandar's behalf when he defended his friend and now client in an episode of "Frontline" focused on the BAE case. Identifying himself as Bandar's attorney, Freeh called the core allegations "totally false," saying that the money in question had gone to the Saudi government, not Bandar personally, and that those charging fraud were applying "a U.S. corporate governance matrix to another country and another culture that operates quite differently." (Freeh's office said he was traveling and unavailable to comment for this article). When his interviewer mentioned an FBI supervisor, Dennis Hormell, who had examined Saudi bank accounts in the United States, Freeh replied, "Yeah, I know Dennis very well." Which is presumably the point of hiring Freeh.

In recent months, Bandar has entered one of his fabled black periods. He is persona non grata in Obama's Washington, where even some former admirers now believe that the BAE charges are at least partly true. So now, with his reputation stained and his power depleted, he has vanished from public view, possibly struggling with his long-rumored depression. "He's out of sight," says Simon Henderson, a Saudi expert at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

As for Freeh, Henderson says: "He's just making a fool of himself," by trying to cast the BAE payments as a legal commission. Yet perhaps Freeh grew so enchanted with Bandar that the corruption charges truly anger him. After all, Freeh has always seen himself as a man of principle—a sensibility he lyrically described in the commencement address he delivered at Hillsdale College last May. Freeh implored the young graduates to remember their core values: "Your integrity and your honor are what's most important at the end of the day."

Michael Crowley

Last Rites

Lights out for Christian America?

Book, magazine, and newspaper publishers love headlines announcing the "end" of this or that—because they sell books, magazines, and newspapers. And so we have last month's *Newsweek* cover story, "The End of Christian America." Really? Christian America is coming to an end? Didn't left-wingers spend the past eight years telling us that we were on our way to becoming a Christian theocracy? And, now, we're living through the end of Christian America? So soon? That's certainly a relief. Better buy this issue of *Newsweek* and read that story!

But wait: Don't bother. What you'll find if you plow through its 4,000 or so words is nothing very remarkable. The author, *Newsweek* editor Jon Meacham, cites some widely reported statistics: For instance, 8 percent of Americans in 1990 claimed no religious affiliation, whereas now 15 percent do. Over that same period, the number of self-identified Christians fell ten percentage points, from 86 percent to 76 percent. That's right, what was once an overwhelming majority of Americans has shriveled to … a slightly smaller overwhelming majority of Americans. And that means we're living through the end of Christian America. Eventually. Down the road. If trends continue unchanged for a very long time. I guess.

Actually, what Meacham's statistics show is something far less monumental, but far more interesting, than his headline would have us believe. Fights over the role of religion in American public life nearly always concern the question of which theology (and how much) should be incorporated into the country's civil religion—that is, into the spiritual dimension of its national identity. During the middle decades of the 20th century, the victor in this battle was liberal (mainline) Protestantism. (Meacham seems to favor a return to something along these lines.) More recently, over the last decade, the religious right has made a strong push for elevating a synthesis of traditionalist evangelical Protestantism and orthodox Roman Catholicism to a central place in the public square. That, in turn, has led to a backlash among the huge number of Americans who are non-Christians, less fervent Christians, and not-at-all-religious Christians. Which explains why somewhat fewer Americans are now

ANTHONY RUSSO

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identifying as Christians and somewhat more are identifying as secular.

But this leaves the most intriguing question unanswered: What will provide the theological content of the nation's civil religion now that the evangelical-Catholic alliance has proven unsuitable for a pluralistic country of 300 million people? To my mind, the most likely and salutary option is something that sociologist Christian Smith has called "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism." Here, in Smith's words, is the core of its catechism:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.

2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.

3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.

4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when he is needed to resolve a problem.

5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

Theologically speaking, this watered-down, anemic, insipid form of Judeo-Christianity is pretty repulsive. But, politically speaking, it's perfect: thoroughly anodyne, inoffensive, tolerant. And that makes it well-suited to serve as the civil religion of the highly differentiated 21st century United States.

Would this mark "The End of Christian America"? Only if we define "Christian America" the way the religious right prefers to—namely, as a nation with the outlook of an evangelical Protestant or orthodox Catholic church. Viewed in broader terms, a nation in which a majority embraced something like Moralistic Therapeutic Deism would still be Christian in all kinds of important ways—its moral and civic outlook, for example, would be a distillation of the Christian ethic of loving one's neighbor—it just wouldn't be the kind of Christian nation that makes a theocon feel all warm and fuzzy. And that's a very good thing indeed.

DAMON LINKER

Damon Linker, who teaches writing and religious studies at the University of Pennsylvania, regularly blogs at TNR.com.

The Next Afghanistan

Pirates, Al Qaeda, hellish climate. . . . Yemen has it all.

I AM SWEATING through my *abaya* as I drive to meet the sheik. It is a hot afternoon in Sana'a, and the sun beats down through an arid blue sky. Wispy pink and blue plastic bags that earlier held an afternoon's worth of the narcotic *qat* leaf float over the congested streets like kites, and children run up to cars paused at intersections, hawking everything from full flatware sets to the tiny perfume samples one might rip from an ad in a fashion magazine.

The university I'm heading for sits on a hillside on the outskirts of town, on land donated by the government in the 1990s. It is the alma mater of a number of high-profile militants, including the "American Talib" John Walker Lindh. Squatting outside the cafeteria, young male students wearing African skullcaps sip tea alongside those in the red-checkered headdresses of the Gulf, and, as my car rumbles past, they look up and meet my gaze, expressionless.

Sheik Abdul Majeed Al Zindani, the school's legendary founder and a former

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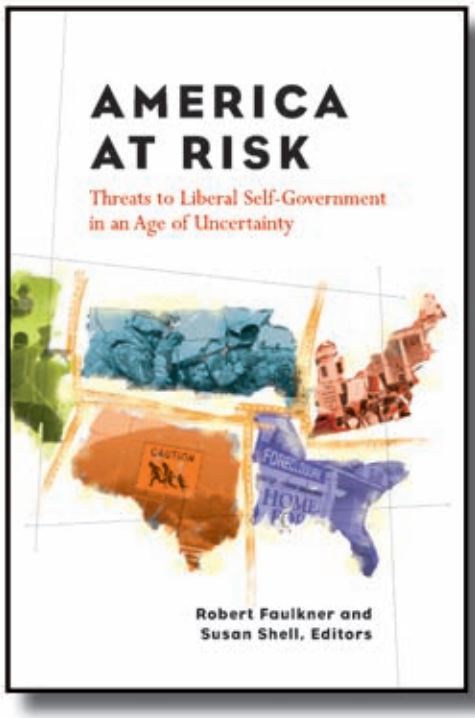

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Islamic warrior who recruited thousands of Yemenis to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s, does not often meet with Westerners. The United States calls him one of Osama bin Laden's spiritual mentors and has labeled him a "specially designated global terrorist." His face is long beneath a white turban, his beard ruddy with henna. When we meet, I find myself thinking that, for someone who commands so much power, who can raise tens of thousands of dollars with one lecture, he is trying to make himself as dull and professorial as possible.

The sheik speaks at length about science and the Koran, his pet issue. Then I ask his perspective on people who carry out acts of violence against Western targets in Yemen and elsewhere in the name of Islam. His reply is forceful. "Does each country need an army and security?" he asked, referring to militant Islamist groups like Al Qaeda. "Of course, yes. . . . We fight to defend ourselves, as protectors of the Holy Koran. We fight those who fight us here. We fight for the sake of the weak, for those who cannot get their rights."

It is apparently the first time Zindani has spoken out in support of anti-Western attacks in Yemen, and, when I run his comments by Yemeni journalists and analysts later, they are surprised. "Did he really say '*jaish*' [army]?" asks Gamal Amer, editor-in-chief of *Al Wasat*, who is known among his colleagues for his sources within Al Qaeda. While there were reports that the bombers of the *USS Cole* were acting on a religious decree issued by Zindani, he has always denied inciting any violence. These statements could signal a new direction.

All of Yemen seems to be entering uncharted territory, and the sheik's message is just one of a series of alarming developments. Earlier this year, Al Qaeda announced the merging of its groups in Yemen and Saudi Arabia into a unified organization called Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, headed by a Yemeni who was a close associate of bin Laden's. At his testimony before Congress in April, the new commander of U.S. forces in the Middle East, General David Petraeus, singled out Yemen as a priority; conditions there, he said, offer Al Qaeda and other groups "a safe haven in which to plan, organize, and support terrorist operations." Experts say that in addition to Islamic extremists, Somali pirates currently terrorizing ships in the Indian Ocean may already have begun seeking refuge along Yemen's shores. And they worry that the 99 Guantánamo detainees slated to return to Yemen this year could become potent symbols for anti-Western groups. These factors, combined with a pending economic crisis and weakening government, have raised the question of whether this desperately poor country could become the next Afghanistan.

I arrived in February with a series of somewhat contradictory mental snapshots of the country. It is the land where Noah's Ark was launched and Osama bin Laden's father was born. It is a country where Westerners are routinely kidnapped by tribesmen but rarely harmed, where suicide bombers struck the *USS Cole*, where young women lower the blinds and cast off their *abayas* to dance and chew *qat* with their friends. But, during my two-month stay, I was continually confronted with the question of whether this traditional land was being propelled into a sinister future.

I was visiting the port of Aden in March when a suicide bomber blew himself up amid South Korean tourists at a

Sana'a Struggles: The economic prospects for Yemen this year are "dire," according to one World Bank economist.

FRANÇOIS FONTAINE/AGENCE VU/AURORA PHOTOS

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UNESCO World Heritage site. A few days later, as I was heading back to the capital, another suicide bomber targeted a group of officials investigating the first attack. Suddenly, even some of my new friends who were dismissive of prior attacks grew somber. "It breaks my heart," says Faris Sanabani, the secretary to the president, who normally exudes implacable confidence. Even after the car-bomb attack on the U.S. embassy last September, he did not feel this way. "This is the first time an individual suicide bomber has struck against soft targets, like in Iraq and Afghanistan, and it means they're starting something different here."

The growth of extremism could be due to a recent sharp rise in poverty. Residents note an increase in the number of beggars on the streets, mostly women in *abayas* who shuffle silently up to cars with their black-gloved hands outstretched. Although economic indicators for Yemen have long been dismal, this year they have become, simply put by one World Bank economist, "dire." While Yemen was already the poorest and most populated country in the Gulf, according to World Bank reports, historic floods and the rise in food prices have increased the number of people below the poverty line to an estimated 42 percent. High population growth has led to skyrocketing unemployment, and the plunge in oil prices last year has led the government—which depends on oil for more than 65 percent of its revenue—to announce that it would slash expenditures in half this year. (So far, that hasn't happened.)

The most drastic forecast is that Yemen's economy could simply collapse in the next year or two. "If the government can't pay its contractors, banks will collapse because they can't get money from contractors and merchants and pay back its loans," says Saif Al Asali, an economics professor at Sana'a University and a former minister of finance, who says revenues have decreased by more than 30 percent already this year. "The government may be able to delay expenditures for a while, but not for more than a year."

"The food crisis, the economic crisis, oil dependence, and the inefficiency of the government—it has all come together," says Dr. Mohammed Al Maitami, who also teaches economics at Sana'a University. He and others also warn that Yemen could run out of both oil and water in the next five to ten years. "There's more than just the risk of state failure. It could be the first country where cities will literally die of thirst," he says.

Whether or not this happens depends on the ability of the government to craft a strategy for a viable future—or get bailed out by the international community. So Abdulkarim Al Iriyani, a former prime minister who remains the top political adviser to the president, has set out to convince Yemen's neighbors and the West that it is in their interest to guarantee the stability of the country. Although $5 billion in aid was pledged at a donors' conference in 2006, very little of that money has been given. (Saudi Arabia, which distributes cash to its neighbor both formally and informally, gives many times more than Western donors.) "It would not be that expensive to help Yemen avoid complete bankruptcy," says Al Iriyani. "Everyone is aware that instability here will create a long line of terrorism from Kenya to Somalia to Yemen, like dominoes."

One Friday morning in Sana'a, some friends took me rock-climbing in the craggy hills just outside the capital, near where a German aid worker and her parents had been kidnapped a few months earlier. They had been held for six days by tribesmen who, in typical fashion, used them as pawns to negotiate with the government for the release of members of their tribe. As we dangled from the cliff, we could hear the muezzins, perched in minarets across the city, one by one sounding their plaintive calls to prayer.

In the distance, in the midst of the city sprawl, we could see the Saleh Mosque, named for President Ali Abdullah Saleh. The massive structure glitters all night, its minarets illuminated by hundreds of lights. In a city of shades of tan, its grounds are kept lush and green despite the water shortage. The building is estimated to have cost between $60 million and what some Western diplomats estimate to be $200 million. Defenders say it was paid for with private funds, but residents point to it as a symbol of how out of touch the president has become.

The 67-year-old Saleh has held onto power since 1978 by skillfully balancing all the country's power bases, tribal sheiks, jihadist groups, and political parties alike. He has selectively released some convicted extremists as part of a strategy to co-opt the country's various jihadist groups. But many now believe that he may be losing control of his own game. Not only has there been an increase in Al Qaeda–sponsored attacks, but separatist sentiment in the south is strengthening, and a rebellion in the north threatens to flare up again at any time.

It is possible, however, that Saleh could use the instability to ensure continued international assistance. "There is a political value to not going after the extremists full force," says Abdulghani Al Iriyani, a political consultant (and nephew of Abdulkarim, though they frequently differ politically). "Without a renegade Al Qaeda presence, the country becomes irrelevant to the West."

This is precisely why the United States is worried about returning the 99 Guantánamo detainees to Yemen and recently sent an envoy to meet with Saleh about it. U.S. officials question whether Yemen is willing or able to keep the returnees from being a threat. "What do you expect from a tribal society such as this one, where if a person gets in an accident, anywhere from twenty to one hundred people go with him to the hospital?" says Khaled Alansi, executive director of HOOD, a human rights nonprofit that has represented all 15 of the detainees who have returned to Yemen up to now. "If they return and feel resentment toward the U.S., it will become an issue not of individual hate, but of collective hate."

There are some in the government who recognize that the need for reform is a race against time. Sanabani and a small coterie of young, largely Western-educated men have been working on their own bailout package by luring talent into government ranks and foreign investment into the country. Jalal Yaqoub, the young deputy minister of finance, has been seeking support for his Top 100 Yemenis program, which offers incentives to bring talented Yemenis back into the country. Their twelve-person "investment committee," headed by the president's son, seeks to establish havens for foreign investors, with secure land and sources of electricity and water. "Before, if a company wanted to invest, it would have to wait for two months just to get a document translated. Now, we meet, and in two days, *y'allah*," Sanabani explains as he navigates his Porsche Cayenne through the alleyways of the Old City.

Yet, they are battling not only those in the government who may benefit from the status quo, but also those who simply doubt that in this regime, under such challenging conditions, the country can change its course. The president's political adviser Al Iriyani ticks through the reforms necessary to bring in the kind of investment that could make the country more like its wealthy neighbors in the Gulf. But, he says, "If there was the political will, it would have been done already."

Bay Fang

Bay Fang, a Washington, D.C.–based journalist, has reported extensively from the Middle East.

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Bravo Company

The Pentagon channels "Top Chef."

The cioppino sits, red and inert, in its pot. The teetering "seared ahi tuna neapolitan"—which is actually a napoleon, if you want to get technical about it (I do)—has been splashed with brown squiggles of soy sauce. The lamb loin is seared. There is nothing left to do but eat, which is what Culinary Specialist First Class Tom McNulty prepares to do. He calls his assistants—a pair of women in military kitchen garb—before the cameras, presenting them each with plastic forks. As the ladies dig in, the show's in-house, in-uniform band The Taste Buds amble through a jazzy rendition of "America the Beautiful," and the credits roll.

So ends another episode of "The Grill Sergeants," a cooking show filmed in the commissary at Naval Base San Diego and broadcast on the government-sponsored Pentagon Channel. The program is pitched squarely at a military audience: McNulty spends much of the show singing the praises of the commissary and is probably the only TV chef ever to introduce a dish by saying, "This is something I cook for my admiral at home." And yet, the Pentagon Channel is right there on civilian cable, reaching more than 16 million domestic households.

The network continues to grow, too—rapidly and in several directions at once. Five million podcasts were downloaded from its website last year. It has both a MySpace profile and a presence on Twitter, for the love of Dwight D. Eisenhower. All told, the network has come a long way from the days when it was just a humble government-funded cable channel with a rounding-error budget, uniformed news anchors, and high, arguably propagandistic hopes.

The Pentagon Channel was launched, with a budget of $6 million, in May 2004 as the tenth television channel in the American Forces Network. The other nine are available only to military personnel with special converter boxes, and they air familiar U.S. programming: "Wheel of Fortune," "Spongebob Squarepants," comedies, dramas, and the baffling combination of the two that is "CSI: Miami." The Pentagon Channel, on the other hand, airs original programming and is there for any civilian—a freelance writer, let's say—to stumble upon while wandering the cold chaos of outer-cable.

The Pentagon Channel's initial appearance on satellite television and basic cable packages earned it a level of scorn that has eluded government-run channels such as C-SPAN or NASA TV. "Fire up those TiVos, disinformation fans," a premogulhood Arianna Huffington huffed in *Salon* back in 2005. "Rummy TV is coming soon to a flat screen near you. 'If you hate the truth, you'll love DoD TV!'"

Several years of resounding anonymity ensued—but, whenever the Pentagon Channel did garner attention, it was in the context of how the United States was assuming the characteristics of a nightmare Orwellian state. In April 2008, in the wake of *The New York Times*' revelation that the administration was scripting talking points for ostensibly objective military analysts on cable television, Jonathan Karl of ABC News reported that, "increasingly, the Pentagon is using [the Pentagon Channel] the way other governments—say, North Korea's or Russia's or Cuba's—use state-controlled television: as a tool to disseminate official information without any interference from a free press." Karl based this on Secretary of Defense Robert Gates's preference for Pentagon Channel interviewers over those of the non-uniformed press and warned that "this is actually happening more now [under Gates] than it did under Rumsfeld."

It all sounds awfully sinister, until you actually sit down to watch the thing—which I did, for eight straight hours, because my editor is a sadist. The exercise, crushing as it was, allowed me a perspective on the Pentagon Channel that I didn't have during my previous flip-by viewings. And so, to those worried about Gates's attempt to brainwash the basic-cabled masses, I can now say this: The channel is more goofy uncle than Big Brother. In fact, the Pentagon Channel is most notable as an example of the oxymoron that is state-sponsored entertainment.

This can be said of regular cable, too, but with the Pentagon Channel, I find it hard to shake the sense that the network's essential purpose lies less in the programming than in the commercial breaks. Or non-commercial breaks, in this case—there is no paid advertising on the Pentagon Channel.

Instead, these interruptions serve both to preserve the rhythm of civilian television and to give the Pentagon Channel an opportunity to promote itself. (One Pentagon Channel promo promises that the channel is "Not just news and briefings. . . . It's fun!") Most of the Pentagon Channel's non-programming programming, though, is given over to "command information" spots, or CIs, which civilians know as public-service announcements. Among these are a motorcycle-safety spot featuring the stars of "American Chopper" and another featuring "Major Savings," the animated mascot of a Defense Department program that provides, among other things, "a list of the financial advisors who have been banned from your base."

The most striking and frequently aired CIs—which run about twice an hour—are a series of stark suicide-prevention spots. "Don't isolate from your spouse after deployment," another CI urges, before pointing viewers to the website afterdeployment.org, which describes itself as "a mental wellness resource for Service Members, Veterans, and Military Families."

The heaviness of these CIs stand in stark contrast to the news shows that make up the majority of the Pentagon Channel's 24-hour schedule. With some notable exceptions, this programming has the professional-but-slight feel of a local newscast, with anchors ranging in bearing from ultra-polished to just-woke-up. If seeing the CIs feels a bit like skimming some particularly rough pages in the military's personal diary, watching the news program "Around the Services" seems more like reading the dorky e-mails about teamwork, uplift, and quirkery that had been forwarded by its mom.

And then rereading them. A three-minute profile of Army Major Melissa "Gun'Her Down" Mitravich—who oversees mobilizations between roller-derby matches—aired three times between noon and 2 p.m. on the day of my experiment. Another piece, about a lieutenant general visiting an Air Force base in Kyrgyzstan, was beginning its fourth post-noon deployment around 2:15 when it was preempted by a speech from President Obama.

But enough with the news and briefings—where is the "fun" I had been promised? The answer lies in the hour-long programming block featuring "The Grill Sergeants" and the exercise show "Fit for Duty." To call these the most civilian-friendly shows on the network is, of course, relative—several minutes of "The Grill Sergeants" episode on my eight-hour day were given over to watching a uniformed dietician teach Air Force Master Sergeant Rusty

ANTHONY RUSSO

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Barfield, the "Commissary Commando," about the importance of a balanced diet. Little cooking was done on-screen, and, while the recipes are available online, each dish was assembled in just a few minutes of screen time.

Which was fine by me, because I didn't have the necessary wonton wrappers, tuna, or cabbage on hand to construct McNulty's Neapolitan. However, I *had* planned on attempting the on-screen workout on "Fit For Duty" in my living room. Instead, I found Air Force Master Sergeant Mike Skaggs leading a workout featuring a complicated-looking military-issue "suspension trainer" called TRX. This bungee-enhanced strap/brace/harness contraption exists at the strange nexus of S&M and fitness equipment. "I know all of you warriors have them," Skaggs exhorted.

This warrior doesn't, naturally, which left me on the couch, watching Skaggs lead two assistants, their TRX braces fastened to a truck, through a workout on a beach at Naval Air Station Coronado. The Rolling Stones' "Brown Sugar" thumped dimly in the background. Informational tidbits—"The TRX was designed for soldiers in mobile environments"—periodically appeared on-screen. Skaggs pointed a stern finger into the camera and barked, "Don't you quit!"

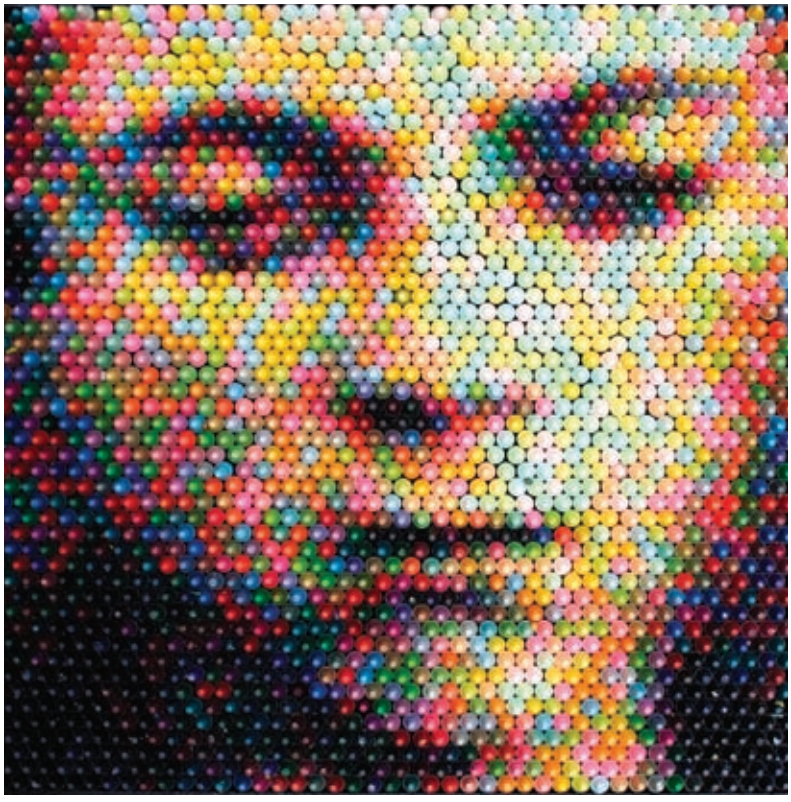
But by the second go-round of "Fit For Duty," I quit. I had to. For the sake of my sanity. Yet I stepped away from the couch heartened. Because, although the channel's very existence recalls an era, not so long past, when the idea of a state-sponsored propaganda network seemed queasily plausible, the Pentagon Channel is, first and foremost, a vivid demonstration of why no pundit will ever propose nationalizing NBC.

DAVID ROTH

David Roth is a writer living in New York.

Pointillist Questions

There's an element of the stunt to Christian Faur's work—thousands of crayons packed tightly together, so that their tips join to form photorealistic portraits. Or are they sculptures? Crayons, the tool of choice for indiscriminate scribbling, are meticulously arrayed. (Faur, a physicist by training who is director of collaborative technologies in the arts at Denison University, hand-casts his crayons in thousands of colors.) But the medium adds to the poignancy of the message. Faur's subject is often childhood—and the haunting nature of nostalgia. His work can be seen at christianfaur.com.



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Pablo Lobaton

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Straight Man

Defusing the Biden bomb.

MICHELLE COTTLE

Miami, Florida

The vice president of the United States folds himself into the rear seat of the black SUV and immediately starts cracking wise about the impromptu interview he has graciously granted me—pretty much all of which is to remain off the record. "You know how *disciplined* I am," he chuckles, blue eyes crinkling and twinkling. "I'm *known* for my discipline." Biden reaches into a compartment beside him, whips out a large microphone, and threatens to hold forth for everyone within earshot of the vehicle's external PA system. Only the faintest shadow of anxiety falls across communications director Jay Carney, perched in the jump seat across from us. To be shepherd of this veep's image requires learning to take a breath and, as Biden aides and assorted fans like to put it, "let Joe be Joe."

Of course, letting Joe be Joe has been known to cause the occasional headache for Team Obama. Just over two weeks before Election Day, Biden uttered this unhelpful prediction at a Seattle fund-raiser: "It will not be six months before the world tests Barack Obama like they did John Kennedy. . . . Watch, we're gonna have an international crisis, a generated crisis, to test the mettle of this guy." The day after the inauguration, the new vice president, while swearing in a batch of federal employees, joked about his memory being "not as good as Justice Roberts's"—a jab at the Supreme Court chief's flubbing of the presidential oath—prompting Obama to give Biden a disapproving nudge. A couple of weeks later, at the House Democrats' retreat in Williamsburg, Virginia, Biden couldn't resist sharing his not-exactly-on-message view of the economic recovery effort: "If we do everything right, if we do it with absolute certainty, there's still a thirty percent chance we're going to get it wrong." Later asked about Biden's remark, Obama went with the wry brush-off: "I don't remember exactly what Joe was referring to. Not surprisingly."

Biden's tendency to floss with his own shoelaces might strike the casual observer (not to mention late-night comedians) as something of a political liability. The White House seeks to portray it as quite the opposite: Faced with a vice president incapable of censoring himself, Team Obama has set about turning this nuisance into a strength. Forget everything you may have heard about Senator Biden, the impolitic, self-promoting, long-winded gaffe machine. Meet Vice President Biden, the brutally frank, calls-'em-like-he-sees-'em, couldn't-be-a-yes-man-if-his-life-depended-on-it truth-teller. Discussing the veep, Biden's colleagues rely liberally on descriptors such as "authentic," "real," "honest," "blunt," "a straight shooter." Within this framework, Biden's lack of a verbal filter is the modest price one pays for a politician of conspicuous integrity, openness, and candor—rare and welcome traits in this industry, no?

The packaging is one of those win-win arrangements management gurus are always extolling: Biden gets to revel in his image as a fearless, forthright man of principle. The rest of the team gets to strategically deploy Biden's big mouth without feeling compelled to address his every stumble. Everyone goes home happy.

There's just one catch: If Biden speaks the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, what happens should he eventually utter a disastrously inconvenient truth—not a run-of-the-mill gaffe but something more grave and substantive? Will the White House ultimately regret its decision to attach ethical import to the vice president's candid, digressive, unpredictable, and occasionally out-of-control political style?

Departing Washington for Miami at the crack of dawn, Biden came strolling down the aisle of Air Force Two, chatting up his fellow travelers. At one point, the conversation turned to dogs. The veep *loves* 'em—especially the big breeds—and he is clearly enamored of his six-month-old German Shepherd, Champ, with whom he faithfully rises at 6 a.m. each day for a morning constitutional. Envisioning Champ and his master gamboling across the grounds of the Naval Observatory, one is struck by how much Biden himself resembles an overgrown pup: friendly, open, enthusiastic, a shade uncontrollable, and so damn happy. At 66, the man is a ball of pent-up energy. He fidgets when he talks—squirming in his seat, waving his hands—and he's a toucher: He'll tap your wrist, grab your elbow, clasp your shoulder, and lean in close to make a point, pinning you to the wall with those eyes. In meetings, he doodles—mostly houses. (Staffers say he is a frustrated architect.) For stress relief, "he likes to dig up and move around large trees," reports a long-time Senate aide. And he is a chronic furniture-mover, known for shuffling the sofas in his massive Senate chambers. Despite, or perhaps because of, the trials and tragedies punctuating his life—the childhood stutter, losing his first wife and infant daughter to a car crash in 1972, barely surviving two brain aneurysms in 1988—his outlook is exhaustingly upbeat.

This gabby, let-it-all-hang-out amiability is central to the vice president's presentation as the most open, guileless man in politics—the un-Cheney, a role of peculiar import in the nation's post-Bush hangover. Indeed, whatever one thinks of Biden, it's tough to picture the unfocused, attention-loving motor-mouth convening hush-hush meetings and hatching shadowy plots in some undisclosed location. Biden comes across as the sort of guy for whom phrases like "open book" and "what you see is what you get" were coined. And his office has been working to reinforce this image, acknowledges his chief of staff, Ron Klain, citing efforts ranging from the disclosure of Biden's daily schedule to opening up his residence to lawmakers and local school kids. "Part of it is a reflection of his personal style," notes Klain. "Vice President Biden is very personable and likes being with people. He's very open, easy, approachable."

And honest. Let's not forget honest. Biden, the White House wants everyone to know, is so habitually candid that he cannot help but speak his piece, even in front of the boss. As Obama recently told *The New York Times*, "Joe is very good about sometimes articulating what's on other people's minds, or things that

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they've said in private conversations that people have been less willing to say in public. Joe, in that sense, can help stir the pot." And stir he does, colleagues report. In meetings, Biden is not shy about disagreeing with the president or other top advisers. He defends his position with characteristic, occasionally disconcerting gusto. Sometimes his view carries the day. (He was reportedly influential in the decision to pursue more limited military involvement in Afghanistan.) Other times it does not. (He loudly opposed attempting health care reform in the current economic climate.) Whatever the outcome of a particular debate, however, the dynamic plays to both Obama's self-image as one who encourages dissent and Biden's self-image as one who delights in providing it.

Painting a portrait of Biden as dogged truth-teller has advantages for the White House beyond letting the public know that Obama tolerates contrarians. It also makes the vice president a valuable spokesman for controversial policies, most notably in the crucial, complex realm of the economy. Not long after the election, Obama tapped Biden to serve both as head of the Middle Class Working Families Task Force (grandly charged with "raising the living standards of middle-class, working families in America") and overseer of the recovery effort. At first glance, this seems a counterintuitive mandate for a politician whose experience and interests lie deep in the jungles of foreign policy. Biden himself was surprised when, having sent the president a long memo on the need to follow the stimulus money, he found the whole sprawling project tossed in his lap. But many in the White House see Biden as a natural public face for the recovery effort. With his humble background, his enduring distinction as one of the Senate's poorest members, and, of course, his reputation for saying what's on his mind, the vice president has an edge in the Regular Guy department. To hear colleagues tell it, Biden is forever lecturing the administration's pointy heads to get real. "Sometimes economists' thinking gets a little too Aspen Institute-y. They forget the people who ride the Amtrak with Joe," says White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel. "Joe gives these people a reality check." Biden's top economics adviser, Jared Bernstein, agrees: "When I brief him, his not-uncommon criticism is, 'Would you speak English and not economese?'" Adds Bernstein, "Something I've learned from him is that people are willing to work with us if we talk to them like grown-ups and explain the lay of the land, what it is we face, and how we get from here to there in honest, coherent terms."

Among the constituencies with whom Biden's forthright charms come in handy is organized labor. Upon touching down in the Sunshine State, Biden promptly headed for Miami Beach's swank Fontainebleau hotel to address the AFL-CIO's Executive Council. After union president John Sweeney's brief intro to the invitation-only crowd, Biden delivered a we're-in-this-together stemwinder that blended political shoptalk with his trademark rambling. ("Thank you very much. Hey, thanks for the welcome! You make it believable! I tell you what, it's like visiting Jimmy Williams in Philadelphia. Hey, it's good to be—at least in my best comfort zone, man. The best place for me to be my whole career is surrounded by organized labor. And I know how to say 'union.' An old joke, Mr. President, you know, you go home with them that brung you to the dance. Well, you all brought me to the dance a long time ago. And it's time we start dancing, man. It's time we start dancing.") But, if his 40-odd minute speech was at times unfocused, it was also poignant, as when Biden spoke of parents having to take "that longest of walks up a short flight of stairs" to their child's room to explain that they had lost their job (which his own father was forced to do when Joe was a boy). And, when Biden offered a paean to his boss ("This is a stand-up guy; this is a guy who could have grown up in our neighborhoods; this is a guy who gets your back; this is a guy who's tough"), it was a moment both emotional and politically shrewd. These labor guys may have voted for Obama, but they don't really know him—not like they know Joe. Biden has been their man for decades, including during last year's election: The unions were feeling sorely neglected by Team Obama until Biden came on the scene. "He was like, 'Call me. Fly with me,'" recalls one campaign aide. "He was able to really keep people happy and keep the grumbling to a minimum."

At the Fontainebleau, Biden's implicit message was clear: *Trust me. I don't like these fancy-pants bankers any more than you do. But bailing out their bacon is a necessary evil.* And, as the veep plowed into the audience for an intense round of post-speech hugging, cheek-kissing, and back-slapping, you got the sense these union leaders were inclined to cut their friend some slack. After all, who could mistrust such a down-to-earth truth-teller?

Of course, there can be such a thing as too much truth. And here's where the administration's managing of its unmanageable vice president could get tricky. For starters, all the talk of Biden's openness and compulsive frankness can, now and again, make him sound a shade unbalanced—like the title character in the 1998 film *Bulworth*, who, as his Senate career hits the skids, starts speaking his mind about culture and politics, but only after contracting to have himself killed. Even as Biden's colleagues express great respect for him—especially his folksy ability to communicate with the unwashed masses—there is a fair amount of eye-rolling and chuckling about his lack of impulse control. This is, remember, a field in which excessive candor is typically regarded as a sign of hopeless naïveté or mild insanity.

Even more problematic is the possibility that Biden will say something seriously damaging. Historically, most of his gaffes have been of the embarrassing-but-non-destructive variety. Most, but not all. Recall that this is a man who stepped on the rollout of his own presidential campaign by musing about how his then-opponent was "the first mainstream African American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy." He also invited a struggling McCain campaign to reopen discussion of Obama's foreign policy inexperience with his pre-election remarks about the new president being tested. Already, there is gentle speculation (even among some former Biden aides) as to what would happen if, say, the vice president indulged in off-the-cuff speculation about unemployment topping 10 percent or let leak his objections to one of the boss's foreign policy moves. Having pitched Biden as the ultimate truth-teller, the administration could have a mess on its hands. At that point, expect Team Obama to start swiftly recasting Biden as less a man of uncompromising principle than a Bulworth-esque goofball.

That, however, is a problem for another day. For now, the White House seems content to let the vice president charge onward as fearless in-house contrarian and truth-spouting ambassador to regular folks. Whether this plays out happily or ruinously remains to be seen. But that suspense is just part of the fun of watching Joe be Joe. ◆

ANTHONY RUSSO

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Race to the Top

Like it or not, the president is about to confront civil rights.

JEFFREY ROSEN

The Supreme Court this month is hearing two potentially landmark cases on race. The first challenges Congress's extension of the Voting Rights Act; the second, a controversial affirmative action program in New Haven. In both cases, the Court may force Barack Obama to do what he has the unique skills but not the political incentive to do at the moment: carve out a third way in the race debate, one that rejects the extremes of conservative color-blindness and liberal racialism.

Ever since the civil rights era, anti-discrimination law has been frozen in time. As the United States struggled to overcome the legacy of segregation in the 1960s, Congress decided that only the heavy-handed threat of lawsuits could prevent policies that might have an adverse impact on African Americans from being implemented in the first place. Today, however, the old legal theories about the need to deter the intractable and largely unchanging racism of American society are being challenged by new empirical realities. Racism still exists, but it co-exists with other, more hopeful evidence—such as the willingness of white voters in six out of the nine Southern states partially or fully covered by the Voting Rights Act to vote for Barack Obama by equal or even larger margins than they voted for John Kerry. Obama's election doesn't suggest the end of racism, but it does suggest progress in some areas of country, combined with signs of intractability and retrenchment in others.

Moreover, there are obvious costs to the current legal regime, with its obsessive focus on discriminatory effects rather than direct evidence of racist intent. By forcing Southern states to pre-clear all changes in voting policy with the federal government, Congress makes it harder for them to adopt alternative voting systems, such as cumulative voting, that might actually help minorities. Current law also encourages the creation of majority-black and majority-white districts that tend to elect more polarized candidates, hastening the demise of the Democratic Party in the South. And, in the workplace, the current regime puts pressure on employers to abandon the neutral

Edel Rodriguez

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tests for promotion that are the main opportunity for advancement available to many working-class employees.

The Supreme Court may decide that, in light of new empirical evidence suggesting some racial progress, the inflexible vision of racial equality that Congress embraced in the '60s is outdated. If so, the decisions could represent an opportunity for Obama to offer a more convincing alternative. Accepting the Court's invitation to focus on current rather than historical patterns of racism, Obama could insist that the law can respond legitimately to voting and employment policies that have discriminatory effects, but only to those where there is clear and contemporary evidence of actual racist behavior. In the process, Obama could advance the debate about race and law beyond the rut in which it has been stuck for the past generation, crafting a moderate approach that is ultimately better for the country.

Both cases before the Court raise the question of whether the threat of federal lawsuits is still necessary to deter states from adopting policies that have discriminatory effects on African Americans. The first case, *Northwest Austin Utility District* v. *Holder*, challenges Congress's reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act in 2006. At that time, Congress ruled that the nine states that were found to have engaged in voting rights discrimination in the 1960s and '70s must continue, for the next 25 years, to "pre-clear" with the Justice Department any change in voting arrangements that might discriminate against minorities. The extension of the act, which passed with large bipartisan majorities, was premised on the idea that patterns of voting discrimination have changed very little since the '60s. The core fear, then, was that the "covered jurisdictions" might move the location of polling places in ways that would make it harder for minorities to cast a vote.

But the truth is that, in 2006, Congress didn't engage in a serious empirical comparison of voting patterns in the areas of the country that are and aren't covered by the Voting Rights Act. The civil rights establishment was intent on preserving the status quo, which has led to the election of some African Americans in the South at the expense of the Democratic party as a whole; and white Democrats and Republicans in the South concluded it would be political suicide to question the need for sweeping federal oversight, which might make them appear hostile to minorities. More broadly, Northern and Midwestern politicians had no incentive to invite federal oversight of their own districts, some of which are just as polarized as the South. (Chicago and Boston, for example, may have more polarized voting patterns than parts of Alabama.) All in all, neither Republicans nor Democrats were willing to acknowledge the evidence suggesting that discriminatory barriers to ballot access today, unlike the '60s, seem to be very rare.

As Richard Pildes of the New York University School of Law notes, it's extraordinarily unusual these days for the Justice Department to refuse to pre-clear any proposed change in voting arrangements submitted by one of the nine covered jurisdictions. The Department objected in only 0.6 percent of the submissions between 1982 and 2005, and only 0.05 percent of the submissions between 1996 and 2002. Even in this tiny universe of cases, moreover, the vast majority of the Justice Department's objections don't involve obstacles that prevent minorities from casting votes. Instead, according to Pildes, most of them involve redistricting or annexation—that is, changes in the drawing of district lines that influence which candidates win. In those cases, the objection is to patterns of racially polarized block voting, which occur when black voters overwhelmingly favor black candidates and, in the same race, white voters overwhelmingly favor white candidates.

In the 1980s, the Supreme Court announced that racially polarized block voting can itself be considered an example of illegal discrimination under the Voting Rights Act. (The idea was that racial polarization suggested that whites were too racist to vote for black candidates.) The proper remedy, the Court held, was to require the creation of majority-black districts that would allow minorities to elect representatives of their choice. This may have made some sense 20 years ago: The South at that time was mostly Democratic, and racially polarized voting was viewed as a decent proxy for areas where African Americans had no realistic chance of being elected and where discriminatory voting structures endured. Today, however, polarized voting is a far less reliable measure of racism. In an age where race is strongly correlated with political-party preferences—most Southern whites are Republican, and most Southern blacks are Democratic—racially polarized voting may simply mean that black and white voters are voting their party's ticket.

Liberals, always looking for evidence of unconscious racism, insist this isn't the case. But they fail to engage fully with the best evidence of racist voting patterns—the "fall-off rate," which measures whether a black Democratic candidate, such as Obama, does worse among white voters than a white Democratic candidate, such as John Kerry. It's true, as liberals emphasize, that in three of the nine Southern states fully or partially covered by the Voting Rights Act (Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana), Obama did worse among whites than Kerry. But it's also true, as liberals don't emphasize, that in six other covered states (Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Texas, Florida, and Virginia), Obama did the same as Kerry or better. This means that the blanket assumptions on which the Voting Rights Act rests may be simplistic and out of date.

Voting rights cases aren't the only area where the old legal paradigms about race and law are being challenged by new empirical realities. This month, the Supreme Court will also hear *Ricci* v. *DeStefano*, the most controversial affirmative action case of the term, involving the promotion of firefighters in New Haven. In 2003, the city administered a promotion test. The test was validated by independent experts, as federal law requires, to ensure that it focused on job-related skills rather than purely cognitive ones. But, after the test was administered, none of the top-scoring candidates for 15 positions turned out to be African American. (Fourteen were white, and one was Hispanic.) A local preacher contacted the mayor and said he didn't want the test certified because of its racial disparities; the local civil-service board then deadlocked about whether or not the certification of the exam results could lead the city to be sued under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits employment practices that have a discriminatory impact on minorities unless they're required by "business necessity."

As a result of the deadlock, the city refused to certify the exam and promoted no one. The city was then sued by 19 white firefighters (and one Hispanic) led by Frank Ricci, a sympathetic 34-year-old white man. Ricci, who is dyslexic, spent more than $1,000 buying the study guides recommended by the city and paying an acquaintance to record them as audiotapes, which he listened to as he drove to and from work.

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The *Ricci* case is a nightmare for moderate liberal supporters of affirmative action, because it presents the least sympathetic facts imaginable. The Supreme Court has said repeatedly that affirmative action is most troubling when its burdens are concentrated on a few innocent white people rather than being widely dispersed among a large group of white and black applicants. So, for example, the Court in 1985 struck down a teachers' union agreement that white teachers would be fired and black teachers with less seniority would be retained in order to preserve racial balance. We haven't seen such unsympathetic facts in an affirmative action case since the school board of Piscataway, New Jersey, decided in 1989 to fire a white teacher rather than a black teacher who had been hired on the same day. Afraid of a big defeat before the Supreme Court, civil rights groups raised money for that case to be settled out of court. This time, they may not be so lucky.

The latest empirical research on racist decision-making undermines the position of the civil rights groups. Economists have concluded that unconscious racism is most likely to infect hiring decisions involving split-second, discretionary judgments, such as screening a thick pile of resumés into "yes" and "no" piles. A 2005 study published by the American Economic Association found that participants in a resumé study who reported feeling rushed were substantially less likely to pick resumés with African American last names. But this kind of unconscious racism is far less likely to materialize in employment decisions that involve careful deliberation over time—such as the design of the promotion tests in New Haven, which were reviewed and validated by independent experts.

On the Supreme Court, the decisive vote in the affirmative action and voting-rights cases may be cast by Justice Anthony Kennedy, who has rarely met an affirmative action program he will unequivocally endorse. If the Supreme Court strikes down part of the Voting Rights Act and the New Haven affirmative action program, the decisions might be questionable as constitutional matters, since the framers of the Civil War amendments to the Constitution intended to give Congress broad latitude to define discrimination as it thinks best. But Supreme Court defeats would hardly be the worst thing for liberals as policy matters. They would force Obama to articulate a moderate, middle-of-the-road position on race that is rooted in empirical evidence rather than ideology.

This is a position that Obama has been moving toward ever since he taught voting-rights and race law at the University of Chicago in the late '90s. As a law professor, Obama impressed his students with his non-ideological approach to questions involving voting rights and affirmative action. "He was very even-handed and kept his cards close to his chest," recalls David Franklin, now a law professor at DePaul who studied voting rights with Obama in 1997. "He was probably more intellectually engaged by election-law issues than by race and racial issues as such." Franklin says that Obama seemed more interested in empirical evidence about actual voting patterns than in liberal shibboleths about the need for majority-black voting districts or conservative shibboleths about the need for color blindness.

If the Supreme Court rules that Congress needs actual evidence of racially polarized voting before supervising state elections, Obama would have the stature to insist that federal oversight is no longer necessary in some parts of the South but might be necessary elsewhere. Democrats might benefit if the Supreme Court reduced the pressure on Southern states to create majority-minority districts. (Some scholars estimate that the Democrats lost the House in 1994 because of racial redistricting.) At one time, it was believed that blacks would never get elected without safe districts; now the concern runs in the other direction—namely, that drawing safe minority districts that aren't compelled by geography may make it harder for politically moderate black candidates to run and win. A Supreme Court defeat could force Obama to challenge the civil rights establishment by making publicly a case that white Democrats increasingly embrace privately: Now that black officials are winning elections at every level, the design of electoral districts should be left to political horse-trading and negotiation, rather than being micromanaged by Washington.

A defeat in the affirmative action case could also give Obama a chance to move further toward the center. In its Supreme Court brief in the New Haven case, the Obama administration tried to split the difference between the firefighters and civil rights groups, a straddle that represented a victory of sorts for administration moderates who wanted to avoid wholeheartedly endorsing New Haven's quota-driven decision. But the Obama brief fails to answer clearly the core question raised by Judge Jose Cabranes on the lower court: "May a municipal employer disregard the results of a qualifying examination, which was carefully constructed to ensure race-neutrality, on the ground that the results of that examination yielded too many qualified applicants of one race and not enough of another?"

If the Supreme Court says no, Obama might have to acknowledge openly that skepticism about employment tests that have a "disparate impact" on minorities makes less sense today than it did in the 1970s and '80s, when the country was still dealing with the legacy in the workplace of legalized segregation. Obama could wean liberals of the resort to the threat of lawsuits to avoid discrimination in the workplace at all levels. Instead, he might convince Congress that judicial oversight of employment decisions makes more sense when it comes to entry-level hiring decisions, which are more likely to be affected by stereotypical judgments than cases of promotion and firing. At the moment, the vast majority of "disparate impact" cases involve challenges to promotion, demotion, or firing, rather than hiring—but these are precisely the kinds of cases in which impulsive, unconscious racism is least likely to materialize.

Without pressure from the Supreme Court, Obama may never carve out the third way on race that he is uniquely positioned to define. With all the other problems facing the country—from the economy to the war on terrorism—Obama has no incentive to take on liberal racialists who believe we've made little progress on race since the 1960s or conservative color-blind partisans who insist that anti-discrimination laws are no longer necessary. But everything in Obama's background suggests that he has the inclination and ability to help the country transcend the extremes that have defined our racial politics for too long. Racial outcomes in voting and employment are sometimes, but not always, a proxy for racial discrimination, Obama could insist, but only in places where there is actual empirical evidence of discrimination itself. That would provoke a debate rooted in facts rather than stereotypes—one that liberal and conservative ideologues may fear, but that the country as a whole would welcome with gratitude and relief. ◆

ANTHONY RUSSO

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Nudge-ocracy

Barack Obama's new theory of the state.

FRANKLIN FOER AND NOAM SCHEIBER

Barack Obama has the type of mind—orderly, analytical, well-read—that takes naturally to the study of ideas. But he's always been uncomfortable describing himself in ideological terms. Is he a liberal? During the campaign, Obama would mock those who applied the label to him: "There's nothing liberal about wanting to reduce money in politics," he'd say. "There's nothing liberal about wanting to make sure [our soldiers] are treated properly when they come home." Is he a moderate? Certainly not when others have suggested it: He once asked the Democratic Leadership Council to remove him from its list of rising stars.

But, when you look at the sum of Obama's early policies, you begin to see the contours of a distinctive philosophy. Unlike the Progressives or the early New Dealers, Obama has no intention of changing the nature of American capitalism. Not through old-fashioned Jeffersonian means (antitrust) or newer-fangled Hamiltonian techniques (industrial planning). His program doesn't set out to reinvent whole sectors of the economy, not even our broken banking system. And, unlike postwar liberals, he has no zeal for ramping up the regulatory state, aside from tightening the screws on financial services. But, even then, he's resisted key parts of Europe's proposal for greater controls on hedge funds.

Like the New Democrats who ultimately shaped the Clinton administration's agenda, Obama has a deep respect for the market and wants to minimize the state's footprint on it. He has little interest in fixing prices or rationing goods or reversing free-trade agreements. But, while he basically shares the New Democrats' instincts, he rejects their conclusions. Reacting against the overweening statism of their liberal ancestors, many New Democrats came to believe that if government largely got out of the way and let markets work properly, the natural result would be widely shared prosperity. You only need to view the extent of Obama's domestic agenda to know he doesn't agree.

Instead, Obama has set out to synthesize the New Democratic faith in the utility of markets with the Old Democratic emphasis on reducing inequality. In Obama's state, government never supplants the market or stifles its inner workings—the old forms of statism that didn't wash economically, and certainly not politically. But government does aggressively prod markets—by planting incentives, by stirring new competition—to achieve the results he prefers. With health care, for instance, he would make it easier for employees to tote their insurance from job to job, eliminating the disincentive for insurers to invest in preventive care. Or take his bank plan, which helps banks dispose of their toxic assets, reducing uncertainty and making the banks more attractive to private investors—a far less drastic step than nationalization. Rather than force markets to conform to his wishes, he shapes their calculus so they conclude (on their own) that their interests coincide with his wishes.

Obama is hardly the first president to grasp the appeal of manipulating incentives and altering the context in which we make decisions. In the mid-'70s, Charles Schultze, Jimmy Carter's top White House economic adviser, sketched out a version of the conceit in a book called *The Public Use of Private Interest*. Schultze favored "harnessing the 'base' motive of material self-interest to promote the common good"—say, by taxing rather than outlawing harmful activities. A generation later, the behavioral theorists Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, both informal advisers to the Obama campaign, hatched a descendant of this approach. In their own book, Thaler and Sunstein suggested that the government inculcate desirable habits like saving and philanthropy through a series of gentle "nudges."

Given the alternatives—even greater federal involvement, even more federal dollars—such "harnessing" and "nudging" makes enormous political sense. But Obama's version also represents a huge gamble. Many countries have nationalized banks and run health care systems—and we have, at least, a good sense of how those programs would turn out. The Obama approach is largely untested on the scale he proposes, which is far greater than anything Schultze or Thaler and Sunstein imagined. His plans can be dismayingly complex; they often involve heroic assumptions about how people respond to new incentives. There's more than a hint of Ira Magaziner—the much-derided architect of Bill Clinton's 1993 health care plan. But, if it works, Obama will have truly found the Third Way Clinton grasped for a decade ago.

By 1976, Schultze could no longer contain his frustration with the inefficient "command-and-control"-style regulations Democrats had embraced for a decade. He laid out an alternative vision in a series of lectures on the eve of the Carter administration. Under the prevailing approach to worker safety, for example, bureaucrats would hit employers with an endless list of dos and don'ts. "If specific regulations are the only bar to prevent social damages," Schultze wrote, "first it will take 21 pages to deal with ladders, and then even more as time goes on." Schultze advocated a far more elegant alternative: worker-injury taxes and steep workers' comp payouts. By making injuries costly to employers, the government could improve safety without peering onto every factory floor in America.

Schultze helped sell Carter on deregulation, which he brought to the airline and trucking industries. And, though Schultze's broader agenda died with Carter's failed presidency, his ideas lived on in the minds of liberal technocrats like Gary Hart and Michael Dukakis. Then, in 1992, Bill Clinton discovered them through the work of an influential policy guru named David Osborne. Osborne's big idea was "reinventing government" to make it more efficient, more responsive, and altogether more businesslike. In the process, he advocated certain reforms—like public-school choice, tenant ownership of public housing, competition between government and the private sector—that would achieve desired outcomes with a lighter bureaucratic touch. The government should "steer, not row," Osborne proclaimed.

At the time, Clinton was running on a two-pronged strategy of harnessing populist resentments while also redeeming the Democratic Party from its Great Society overreach. To

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accomplish the first goal, Clinton called for strict limits on executive pay and investments in worker retraining. When it came to the second, the Schultze-Osborne model held considerable appeal, and Clinton leaned on it heavily. In response to George H.W. Bush's charge that he was pushing warmed-over tax-and-spend liberalism, Clinton took a page (almost literally) from Osborne's book, telling an audience at the University of Connecticut he wanted to run "a government that steers more than it rows; a government that is a catalyst for action by others; a government that is market-oriented, less bureaucratic, and more entrepreneurial."

After Clinton won, both liberal populists and Osborne-like moderates had reason to believe he would stand with them. Which might have been possible in less constrained times. But the deficits of the early '90s threw the two wings of the party into direct competition. During the transition, Clinton's economic advisers concluded that, if the fiscal status quo persisted, the red ink would top $350 billion by 1997. It sounds almost quaint in our current era of trillion-dollar deficits. But, at the time, the anxiety was palpable. Long-term interest rates had jumped in the fall, and inflation fears were pervasive. Clinton's incoming chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, Laura Tyson, warned of a "long-term risk of financial collapse," according to Bob Woodward's *The Agenda*.

Clinton, like Obama, had spent the transition hashing out his budget priorities and the shape of a stimulus for a recession-weakened economy. He eventually made the exact opposite choices his Democratic successor would, scaling back his beloved middle-class tax cut and domestic spending plans in favor of deficit reduction. The theory behind this decision came straight from Fed chairman Alan Greenspan, vouched for by Clinton's then–economic aide Robert Rubin: The bond market would bid down long-term interest rates in anticipation of lower deficits, which would eventually spur economic growth. Shrinking the deficit would also free up capital for private investment. Still, the move was likely to inflict pain early on, and the realization set Clinton brooding. When Al Gore urged him to be bold like Roosevelt in the 1930s, Clinton snapped: "Roosevelt was trying to help people. Here we help the bond market and we hurt the people who voted us in."

And yet, somehow, Clinton managed to satisfy both—and far sooner than his advisors anticipated. Before long, the economy was creating jobs at a dizzying clip—ten million between 1993 and 1997, another eight million between 1997 and 2000. Rising productivity was driving up wages across the income spectrum. By some measures, poverty was the lowest since the government had begun keeping track. It really did look like shrinking deficits had triggered lower interest rates and unleashed a wave of private investment that was powering the economy to new heights.

It's what came next that darkens the narrative. Amid all the new economy triumphalism, the Clintonites deregulated the telecommunications industry and repealed New Deal–era restrictions on bank consolidation. In 1997, Clinton even signed a bill lowering the capital-gains tax rate, that perennial GOP fetish. Having begun their administration grudgingly appeasing Greenspan, the Clintonites gradually embraced his view that, in many cases, government could do no better than step aside.

In recent months, several of the architects of Clintonomics—Larry Summers, Gene Sperling, Rahm Emanuel—have reassembled to take another crack at creating broad-based prosperity. What's striking is the change in their thinking about how to pull it off.

In fact, the center-left had revised its economic theories while the bubble was still inflating. Beginning in 2004, the data gradually began to undermine the Clintonites' central assumption: that the benefits of growth would accrue to the poor and middle class. Their policies, it turns out, had only temporarily tamped down the income inequality that had been rising since the 1970s. Workers' wages had once tracked productivity growth. Now workers were producing more, but only the wealthy were reaping the rewards; everyone else's income had basically flattened out. The economists Robert Gordon and Ian Dew-Becker, both then at Northwestern, put into words what much of their profession was thinking. "A basic tenet of economic science is that productivity growth is the source of growth in real income per capita," they wrote in 2005. "But our results raise doubts, that we find surprising and even shocking, about the validity of that ancient economic paradigm." Worse still, it was tough to pin these findings on George W. Bush. Although his tax cuts had undoubtedly exacerbated the trend, they couldn't account for what was happening to pre-tax income.

Suddenly the '90s were looking less and less like the dawn of a new economic model and more like a historic anomaly fueled by a once-in-a-lifetime technology boom. And what remained when the boom subsided was insecurity, dislocation, and stagnating standards of living. Globalization was especially bracing. The Clintonites had believed strongly in greasing the flow of goods and capital across borders. Now they wondered if they'd oversold the benefits and understated the costs. Alan Blinder, a former Fed Vice Chairman and White House economic adviser, published a paper warning that between 22 and 29 percent of all U.S. jobs were at risk of being "offshored."

In 2006, Rubin launched a think tank called the Hamilton Project, whose aim was to design a response to the insecurity that didn't threaten free trade and fiscal discipline. Peter Orszag, the former White House aide Rubin hired to run it, christened the approach "warm-hearted but cool-headed." In many respects, the effort represented a new consensus within the party, and the locus classicus of the kumbaya spirit was a *New York Times* op-ed jointly authored by Rubin and Jared Bernstein of the labor-backed Economic Policy Institute. The two men professed their shared desire to see a revived labor moment, one of the few forces they could imagine restoring workers' bargaining power.

During his campaign for the Democratic nomination, Obama sometimes seemed more interested in filleting Clintonism than signing onto the center-left truce. He famously thrashed the politics of triangulation in a Des Moines Jefferson-Jackson Dinner speech that may have saved his campaign. But, looking back over his time in the national spotlight, the periodic sops to populism stand out as the exception. In *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama endorsed fiscal conservatism and deferred to Rubin's instincts on trade. A dialogue between the two about the loss of jobs at an Illinois Maytag plant ends with Obama nodding in agreement: "It was hard to deny Rubin's basic insight," Obama wrote. "We can try to slow globalization, but we can't stop it."

When the Hamilton Project launched in 2006, Obama attended the group's maiden event and lavished it with praise: "some of the most innovative, thoughtful policy-makers . . . the sort of breath of fresh air that I think this town needs." He affirmed this conclusion after winning the election, stocking his administration with the think tank's highest-profile contributors.

He was going to need them. The problem with Clintonism was that it had

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partly sacrificed the goals of 1960s- and '70s-style liberalism even though it had only meant to exorcise the bogeymen. Hence Obama's challenge: to reclaim progressive goals without the economic self-sabotage of the earlier era.

There are no grand theorists in the Obama orbit, certainly no in-house ideologists. During the campaign, Obama sold himself as a green-eyeshade pragmatist, insisting every one of his proposals was "paid for." But, in fact, there is, if not an ideology, then certainly a sensibility that reigns in Obamaland.

Perhaps the easiest place to see it is in the administration's fondness for behavioral economics, the branch of the dismal science that recognizes that humans aren't utility-maximizing automatons, but flawed creatures who often screw up simple calculations and struggle with self-control. The key behavioral insight is that the way we frame choices matters enormously. Take a classic behavioral example: pensions. In a fully rational world, everyone would enroll in their company's 401(k), which provides a financial incentive to save for retirement. In the real world, we frequently put off enrollment, not wanting to weigh all the confusing options or fill out tedious paperwork. If, on the other hand, our employer enrolled us automatically but allowed us to opt out, most would stick with it. Simply by changing the "default" option from out to in, we improve workers' welfare without limiting their freedom.

Thaler and Sunstein have dubbed this policymaking approach "libertarian paternalism," and it was highly influential within the campaign. (Sunstein, a longtime contributor to The New Republic, is now a top official in Obama's Office of Management and Budget.) For example, in addition to the retirement saving reform, which Obama later wrote into his budget, the campaign also warmed to a proposal called "intelligent assignment." The idea was a response to the fact that seniors enrolled in the Medicare prescription drug program are often overwhelmed by the dozens of plans they have to choose from, sometimes to the point of paralysis. The Obama wonks favored automatically enrolling many of them in the plan that best suited their needs, based on their drug-buying histories, then allowing them to switch if they found one they liked better.

In the grand scheme of things, these "nudges" were minor tweaks designed to elicit more rational behavior. But, in many respects, what the Obama administration has done these last few months is simply scale up the logic of nudging, albeit massively. Not all of Obama's nudges fall out of behavioral economics, per se. Some involve changing incentives to encourage certain activities and discourage others. Some involve fostering competition to trigger innovation. But, as in the behavioral examples, the Obamanauts typically have an outcome they want to promote. And, like the behaviorists, they instinctively recoil from imposing it unilaterally. So, instead, they monkey around with the choices people face, seeking to influence decision-making rather than mandate decisions.

Nowhere has this approach been more visible than the administration's response to the financial crisis. When it comes to the banks, many liberal economists favor seizing insolvent institutions, stripping out their toxic assets, restocking their supply of capital, and then selling them off to new owners. But the prospect of something so heavy-handed offends the administration's sensibilities. Instead, Treasury has chosen to partner with hedge funds and private equity firms to relieve the banks of their toxic assets. The thinking is that bad assets create uncertainty, which repels investors and makes it tough to raise money in the financial markets. By moving the toxic assets off their books, Treasury hopes to make the banks more attractive to investors and, therefore, less likely to need public money.

Or take Obama's housing plan, which gives lenders financial incentives to lower monthly payments for borrowers at risk of default. If Obama wanted to intervene directly, he could dispatch government officials to rewrite mortgages. But this is unnecessary—it's actually in the buyers' and the lenders' interest to agree on new terms because the alternative, foreclosure, is so costly to both. The reason it doesn't happen already is that the original lender is the one who decides whether to modify a loan, even though it typically has long since sold the loan off in pieces to investors. The point of the subsidies is to focus the loan originator's mind—to provide an incentive to do what's in the interest of both borrowers and investors.

The idea of nudging actors in the right direction also animates the administration's solutions to our most pressing social problems. For instance, the biggest reason people overconsume fossil fuels is that the prices they pay for oil, gas, and coal don't reflect their true social costs, which include the toll they inflict on the environment. A cap-and-trade system, by limiting overall carbon emissions (as opposed to emissions for any given company) and charging energy producers for the right to pollute, raises prices and forces consumers to weigh the true cost of their activities. This should not only reduce consumption of fossil fuels, it should make alternative energy more competitive and spur investment in green technologies.

As it happens, Schultze was an early proponent of reducing pollution by pricing harmful emissions. (He preferred an emissions tax, which is analytically similar to cap-and-trade.) Schultze saw this as far more efficient than mandating cleaner technologies, such as the catalytic converters Washington had forced carmakers to install. The difference is that Schultze and Osborne—and their political patrons, Carter and Clinton—were trying to scale back an overgrown government and its bloated bureaucracy without abandoning their liberal goals. Obama, by contrast, seeks to *expand* the reach of the state after a generation of retreat. That his approach to this avoids heavy-handed market interventions shouldn't disguise his ambitions.

The administration's health care approach nicely illustrates this mentality. To take one example, the United States has underinvested in preventive medicine for years. Even though such care could save hundreds of billions of dollars in expensive treatments and lost productivity, insurers have little financial incentive to subsidize it because Americans frequently change plans when they switch jobs. The benefits would accrue to another insurer.

One way to fix this would be to make it easier for patients to keep the same coverage as they move from job to job, giving the insurer an incentive to subsidize preventive treatment like regular checkups and cancer screenings. The health care plan Obama talked up on the campaign trail, like many of the Democratic plans currently moving through Congress, does precisely that. (The administration has yet to spell out health care details, but Obama's top wonks are known to favor these innovations, Orszag in particular.)

Another goal is to improve the quality of the health care we receive through competition—as with a so-called "public option," in which government insurance competes with private plans. (In principal, between one-third and one-half of workers could be eligible for the public plan, though the actual number will likely be smaller.) For example, medical research increasingly shows that coordinating treatment—say, having an internist partner with a cardiologist

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to treat a heart patient—yields better results than when doctors work in isolation. But most private insurers have little incentive to insist on cooperation because quality improvements don't currently affect their bottom line. Competition could change that. If the government improved quality—say, by changing the way it reimburses doctors to induce cooperation—then private insurers would have to either follow suit or lose business.

It's a model that's worked in education. The economist Caroline Hoxby has found that competition from private schools and charter schools tends to improve performance at traditional public schools, which risk losing students if their test scores and graduation rates don't keep pace. Charter schools are also an element of the Obama agenda.

The Obama approach can even work by removing obstacles to behavior we'd like to promote. In a 2003 book called *The New Financial Order*, which Obama's wonks read Talmudically, Yale economist Robert Shiller suggested that workers were skimping on productivity-enhancing skills because technology and globalization had made such training risky. When a factory job can be outsourced seamlessly, or when an entire domestic industry can disappear within months, acquiring new skills can seem pointless.

Several of Obama's top economic advisers—Summers, his deputy Jason Furman, Orszag, and Sperling—have embraced one of Shiller's central proposals for reducing this disincentive: wage-loss insurance. The idea is that the government would offset the pay cut a worker might take after losing a job in an industry hit hard by global competition or technological change. The factory worker forced to retreat behind a Gap sales counter would no longer see his income fall through the floor, making the training a less risky bet.

The thread that runs through these proposals is a hands-off approach to markets themselves, but a hands-on approach to the incentives and defaults that influence decisions. Obama only broaches direct intervention when he can't elicit the desired outcome through such rejiggering—as with the numerous investments the market won't finance because it can't capture the returns. Consider the scholarly consensus that every dollar of preschool spending on disadvantaged children produces enormous social returns—increasing future productivity and decreasing tendencies toward criminal activity and unplanned parenthood. Alas, there's no way for a private investor to pocket those savings. That's why Obama's stimulus allocated $2 billion to Head Start and Early Head Start. For similar reasons, Obama spent significant sums on high-speed rail, National Science Foundation research grants, and rural broadband access.

As a theory of government, this approach has much to recommend it. It's resolutely liberal in its ends, ambitious in its means, but also respectful of individual freedom. It is, in other words, a government that is activist but distinctly *not* socialist.

If anything, the lengths to which Obama goes to avoid impinging on the market are almost too great. In the case of the banks, temporary nationalization might be the simplest, most direct approach. By contrast, the Geithner plan, with its Public-Private Investment Program, seems to rely on a set of elaborate assumptions about bank and investor behavior. It presumes banks are willing to sell assets at a loss, that risk-shy investors will be compelled by cheap government financing, that other investors will park their capital in banks once their balance sheets are cleaner. If any of these assumptions fails, the whole effort could fall apart.

The health care plan suffers from a similar Rube Goldberg quality. For example, the "public option" sounds like an elegant way to improve quality by promoting competition. If only it were so simple. The problem is that private insurers have every opportunity to game the system: By skimming off the youngest, healthiest patients and leaving the rest for the government to cover, they drive down their own costs and make the public option look outrageously expensive by comparison. To prevent this, the government would have to restrict the way private insurers woo patients—something that's not impossible, but definitely tricky, given the variety of subtle techniques for screening out the sick. At a certain point, it seems far less complicated to just expand Medicare to everyone. The irony here is hard to miss: In order to keep its hands mostly off the free market, the Obama administration sometimes has to hatch schemes so convoluted they'd make an ambitious social planner blush.

Which raises a final objection: What's so great about private insurers or the people who currently run our banks? We are, after all, talking about a banking industry that triggered a global financial meltdown and which, according to the IMF, may be sitting on trillions in losses to show for it. We're talking about a private health insurance industry that leaves almost one-sixth of the U.S. population without coverage and is a major reason we pay more for health care on average than any other country and get only mediocre results in return.

And yet, Obama has shown little interest in refashioning these industries. Even his proposal for reforming financial market regulation accepted the existence of banks too big to fail, relying instead on an uber-regulator to prevent any single overgrown bank from threatening the financial system. (The alternative would be to use antitrust law to break them into smaller, more manageable pieces.) In light of these industries' track records, Obama's solicitousness might seem puzzling.

Except that it may well work. Private investors *do* part with their money when uncertainty subsides; competition *does* tend to improve quality; markets *do* have a knack for allocating resources, at least when incentives are correctly aligned and the relevant costs are priced in.

Sure, the Obama program makes some big assumptions. Yes, there may be more direct routes to universal health care or a solvent banking system. On the other hand, it's easy to underestimate the challenges of the more statist alternatives. Bank nationalization, for one, is fraught with pitfalls. Anyone who thinks the government would be an efficient manager of large commercial banks clearly wasn't paying attention during the AIG bonus uproar—which, however justified, showed that political realities can trump economic imperatives in a government-run enterprise. In any case, it may be possible to graduate to the more ambitious course if the moderate one fails; it's not obvious that the reverse is true. By first trying to fix the banks with a lighter touch, Obama may strengthen his hand for nationalization if circumstances demand it.

The political point is, in the end, difficult to overstate. Obama has groped toward a form of liberal activism that is eminently saleable in this country—both with the average voter, easily spooked by charges of creeping statism, and the constellation of political interests in Washington. Any economic program that lays out ambitious goals and actually has a chance of achieving them would have much to recommend it on those grounds alone. Better still, it may be the bold, persistent experimentation that the moment demands. ◆

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

IRAN EXPORTED

Along with other distinctions, *Goodbye Solo* is the first Iranian film made in North Carolina. Ramin Bahrani, the director and co-author, was born in Winston-Salem in 1975 to Iranian parents, grew up there, and after taking a degree at Columbia University went to Iran for three years. There he began his film work. Back in New York, he made *Man Push Cart*, unseen by me, and *Chop Shop*, most gratefully seen by me. In *Chop Shop* Bahrani traced delicacy amid grossness—the struggle for selfhood in a boy caught in a world of clanking auto repair and thievery. For his third feature, Bahrani returned to what we can with a straight face call his hometown. There, with Bahareh Azimi, who collaborated on the script for his last film, he made *Goodbye Solo*.

The film can be called Iranian because it virtually asks for it. Iran makes many kinds of films, but in the United States and some other countries the Iranian films that have registered and that remain precious—chiefly those of Abbas Kiarostami—are concerned with large matters of spirit, values in life, even in death. People in those films are in a profoundly contradictory state. On the one hand, they see every day as another day to be dealt with in ways that lie to hand; but they also see every day as a means to weigh the worth of the lives they are living. Hovering over them all is commonality—a linkage with everyone they meet, a sense that they are all bound in a destiny that, no matter what, can be borne in fellowship. Allow for some exceptions, and we can say that, whatever their station, they live both seriously and humbly.

Kiarostami is no tractarian: he is an artist who has fashioned a distinctive style, without arrant virtuosity. He uses heterodox simplification that asks for mature simplicity from us. Time as a presence, quiet, heartbeats and pulses, are constants. We are convinced that these films deal with matters that would exist whether or not the camera was there but that the camera is there for our sake.

All these hallmarks have been adopted by Bahrani for his new film. His *Chop Shop* can be compared with the neo-realist films of postwar Italy. *Goodbye Solo* leaves that genre and aspires to Kiarostami's realm. In fact, Bahrani invites us to compare him with his master. He is not, or not yet, at that level, but his reference is not presumptuous.

The reference is patent. The core of *Goodbye Solo* is openly adapted from Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry*. In the earlier film, a man drives around Tehran trying to find someone who will assist him in suicide, a drive that is a voyage of discovery. Right at the start of *Goodbye Solo*, an elderly man, just arrived in Winston-Salem, makes a suicide deal with his thirty-ish taxi driver. The passenger, William, gives the driver, Solo, a one-hundred-dollar deposit on a thousand-dollar fee. In two weeks Solo will drive him up to the top of Blowing Rock in the Blue Ridge Mountains nearby. The purpose of the trip doesn't have to be specified. The place has its reputation.

GOODBYE SOLO
Roadside Attractions

THE SONG OF SPARROWS
Regent Releasing

William never says why he wants to wait two weeks—in a local motel—though we observe a good deal and can infer much. Those two weeks are like a gift to Solo, who sets out to change William's mind. Incidents are plentiful, but the realities of the film are just these two characters, with Solo more interested in William than the reverse.

William, in his seventies, is lean, hard-bitten, a man who has seen a lot and says little, who apparently wants to spend the next two weeks in thought and small actions that will confirm his decision. Solo is Senegalese, buoyant, ambitious, lately married, with a pregnant wife and a teenage stepdaughter. He enjoys, almost gobbles, life. As part of his urge to move on and up, he has an ambition to become a flight attendant: he even takes an exam during those two weeks. But his prepossessing thought is to change William's mind. Insofar as William permits, Solo accompanies him to bars and pool halls. He even persuades William to come home with him and meet his family. Indeed, one of Bahrani's finest touches is the meeting of the dour William with Solo's wife and daughter, avatars of life both, whom William seems to recognize as such at the same time that we know they are having no effect on him.

Goodbye Solo has no music. This means that, even more than usual, the film relies on its actors for everything we feel. After a bow to Bahrani for setting the high intent of his concept, we can recognize how thoroughly he depends on the two principal actors. Of course, we have also to salute his perception in choosing them: this is always, or should be, part of the director's vocation, but it is not often handled as well as here. William is played by Red West, who has appeared in a number of films and television series but who is, we are told, best known as the bodyguard and close friend of Elvis Presley. It isn't quite

ANTHONY RUSSO

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clear how this occupation prepared him for his role, except that West must have seen and seen through a good deal of flimflam in his life, which gave him the ability—the wish—to be taciturn, grim, settled. Souléymane Sy Savané, who is Solo, has worked as a model in Paris and indeed as a flight attendant. Though he has been on African television, this is his feature debut. He makes Solo ebullient without being aggressive. Life hums in him. He is not unshakably cheery: there are some raspy bits with a drug dealer he knows. But every cell in his body seems eager for William's reversal. And there is a paradox: Solo seems to understand how a man could come to William's decision, but not how he could act on it.

Bahrani is too gifted to let his film become a set of discussions. We move like fascinated companions through those two weeks full of incidents, trifles, small mysteries, dailiness. William—a point notable these days—smokes a great deal. He goes to the movies a lot (and there is a hint that he is somehow connected with a youthful ticket-seller who doesn't seem to know him). The overall effect of *Goodbye Solo* is of living through a drama of huge subjects, articulated in the vernacular. Then, in a manner that is both expected and surprising, the end of the film confirms the need for the film.

About Bahrani's directing as such, I note only one detail. He has found a novel way to shoot interior scenes in a car, with the driver close and the passenger on the other side in the back. But bother the details. Overall, in spirit and being, he connects with his Iranian legacy because, even at his relatively young age, his work seems to fit a comment that the critic Gilberto Perez wrote about Kiarostami: "Kiarostami believes in beauty as he believes in truth, not as a conclusion but as an undertaking." Modestly yet deeply, *Goodbye Solo* moves the undertaking forward.

Coincidentally, here is an Iranian film that actually comes from Iran, but it is not affined to the Kiarostami genre. The writer-director Majid Majidi has done work on grave subjects, but his latest, *The Song of Sparrows*, is folk comedy. It has much of the usual fraternal feeling of Iran's films, but its story could, with relatively minor adjustments, be set in another country.

This is to the good. It is somehow congenial to feel that we are watching a tale that could have been told elsewhere. Accidents do happen anyplace—no visa necessary—and it is a series of accidents that spins the story here. A fortyish man named Karim is a farm hand on an ostrich farm near Tehran. (Elsewhere it wouldn't be ostriches.) By accident he lets one of the ostriches escape, and he is fired. By accident his treasured daughter breaks her hearing aid. Karim motorcycles into Tehran to replace the hearing aid, and, learning that he is very short of the price, finds himself pressed by accident into service as a motorbike taxi: while he sits parked for a moment in a busy street, a man climbs on to the backseat and gives him an address. (Evidently this sort of taxi is common there.) Karim seizes the new chance.

Other accidents follow, including the happy one that concludes matters. By and large, the film makes the most of the fact that people—particularly poor people—have little control over the important things that happen to them. Karim is of course a devout Muslim and eventually is reminded that his life is being carried on under invisible supervision. Yet his troubles with his little son, his various entanglements in the big city, pester him along the way—in empathically amusing style.

Karim is played by Reza Naji, who is perfectly cast. Naji has the kind of face that is distinguished by a lack of distinction: he is Everyman. But, first, that doesn't mean uninteresting, and, second, it helps the folkloric quality of the story. The most sophisticated element in this film is Majidi's camera work, which is full of agile traveling shots and even a few helicopter shots, all far from the workaday shooting that might have served for this unsophisticated story.

The title is puzzling. One brief episode concerns a sparrow, much like the sparrow bit in the recent Russian film *12*, but it has little to do with Karim. It has even less to do with his figurative song in this film, which is a song of acceptance, of forbearance, of patience with the divinity that is shaping his end. ◆

Louis Begley
BEFORE THE LAW

FRANZ KAFKA: THE OFFICE WRITINGS
Edited by Stanley Corngold, Jack Greenberg, and Benno Wagner
(Princeton University Press, 394 pp., $45)

Franz Kafka was born in Prague in 1883 into an assimilated German-speaking middle-class Jewish family. He died of tuberculosis of the larynx in 1924, just short of his forty-first birthday, in Kierling, a small resort north of Vienna. Except for six months at the very end, when he escaped to Berlin with Dora Diamant, a young Polish-Jewish woman, and some inconsequential vacations, a number of which he spent in sanatoriums, and business travel in Bohemia and adjoining Moravia on behalf of the insurance company for which he worked, Kafka lived out his humdrum life in Prague, proving true the prediction he made at nineteen in a letter to a school friend: "Prague doesn't let go. The old crone has claws. One has to yield."

The "old crone" was the capital of the former Kingdom of Bohemia, a Habsburg possession. After Vienna and Budapest, it ranked as the third most important city in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The great majority of Bohemia's population were Czech-speaking ethnic Czechs. German was the language of government and instruction, and of the upper and middle classes; and it was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that nationalist Czechs wrested from the Habsburg administration theoretically equal status for their language. The small but ascendant German-speaking minority consisted of ethnic Germans and assimilated Jews. A minority within a minority, the Jews were ringed by the hatred of nationalist Czechs for everything German and by their virulent anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism was also commonplace among Christian Germans, but it was of the more "intelligent" sort that, unlike the Czech variety, did not break out in paroxysms of violence and destruction of property. After the defeat of the Central Powers in the fall of 1918, Bohemia became part of the newly independent Republic of Czechoslovakia, and from one day to the next the tables were turned on the German speakers in the land. They were no longer dominant in politics, and their language lost its official status.

Kafka's name is used in its adjectival form around the world by millions

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of people who have never read a line he wrote: "Kafkaesque" is the universal term for experiences of modern life that leave one anxious, disconcerted, and feeling helpless. It is an odd form of adulation that carries with it the potential for trivializing Kafka's work and its scope. But the grip of Kafka's fiction on readers of all ages seems undiminished and his appeal to scholars seems well nigh universal. His life and work continue to receive an extraordinary amount of attention from critics and literary theorists and historians, who have made the dissection of his texts the center of their careers.

Academic Kafka scholarship—Kafkology, as Milan Kundera has called it—would have never gotten off the ground, or would have run out of steam long ago, if Max Brod, Kafka's closest friend and de facto literary executor, had not chosen to disregard Kafka's last instructions, which were to burn, unread, his personal papers: all the manuscripts, diaries, notebooks, letters, and drawings—he drew very well—that came into Brod's possession or were in the hands of others. Kafka wanted only the works that were published in his lifetime, which were his only completed works, to stand as his surviving oeuvre. (From these he excluded *Contemplation*, a slim collection of prose poems published in January, 1913, which he disavowed. He did not wish to put Brod to the trouble of buying such copies of it as still existed and destroying them.) As for documents in the hands of others, he enjoined Brod to "ask for them in my name. Letters which they do not want to hand over to you, they should at least promise faithfully to burn them themselves."

But Brod believed that the "unpublished work contains the most wonderful treasures, and measured against his own work, the best things he has written," and so he decided to destroy nothing. Indeed, he set out to publish as expeditiously as possible the unfinished fiction. Overcoming obstacles that seemed insuperable—the dire economic and (especially for Jews) political situation in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s—he succeeded in arranging for the publication by 1937 of the great unfinished novels, *Amerika*, *The Trial*, and *The Castle*, the unfinished stories, many of Kafka's letters to his family, friends, and editors, and excerpts from his diaries.

The open question was the fate of Kafka's letters to Felice Bauer, to whom he had been twice engaged, and to Milena Jesenská, his last great love. Not having pressed for their return in the months that followed Kafka's death or for their destruction, Brod lost control over this part of Kafka's estate. Milena died in a German concentration camp. The letters to her were published in Germany in 1952, by a friend to whom she had given them for safekeeping in 1939, just as the German army was entering Prague. Felice managed to escape Germany with her family, moving first to Switzerland and then to the United States. She had taken Kafka's letters with her and sold them in 1955 to Schocken Books, and Schocken published them in 1967. Given Brod's prodigious indiscretion, he too would have probably published both Felice's and Milena's letters. The postwar period saw also the publication by Brod of Kafka's complete diaries as well as the astonishing letter to his father, in its handwritten form more than one hundred pages long, that Kafka wrote in 1919 but never delivered to him.

R.B. Kitaj, *Kafka*, 2004

Thus was constituted the trove of Kafka's painfully personal papers that has since been ransacked by scholars looking for the sources of his inspiration, for the materials that he put to use in his fiction. They have battened by preference on scraps of paper: unconnected pages in his notebooks, for example, of which there are many. Stanley Corngold, one of the editors of *The Office Writings*, repeats in his contribution to the volume, as though they were an incantation fraught with meaning, the words "You, I said…." taken from a jejune fragment transcribed in 1910 in Kafka's diary. Such Delphic pronouncements from the grave lend themselves with particular ease to fanciful, if not bizarre, interpretations. In the words of Reiner Stach, the author of the most recent comprehensive biography of Kafka, most of the published material resulting from such research "consists of unsupported speculation or academic verbiage. No theory is too far-fetched to have been advocated somewhere by someone; there is no methodological approach that has not been used to interpret Kafka's work. Some monographs resemble autistic games; it is impossible to imagine a reader who might reasonably benefit from them.… It seems like an industry that is an end unto itself.…"

And a largely superfluous industry, when one recalls that Kafka was able to gain the admiration of early readers, including Rilke and Musil, Benjamin (perhaps the most astute critic of Kafka's work) and Thomas Mann, Auden and Camus, without any of them having had access to his personal papers, or being aware of more than the barest outline of his life story. The silver lining in this large dark cloud of advanced Kafka studies is that the more extreme conceits of the professors are so rebarbative that there is almost no risk of their coming to the attention of general readers, and thereby interfering with their response to Kafka's art.

KAFKA WAS A LAWYER, and his day job was at an insurance company. After receiving, in June 1906, a law degree from the German Ferdinand-Karls Universität in Prague, he spent nine months as a clerk at the high court in Prague, and, in the spring of 1907, he went to work for the Prague branch of Assicurazioni Generali, a large international insurance company based in Trieste. Work conditions at Assicurazioni were egregiously unpleasant, and Kafka quit after less than a year, giving as his reason the poor state of his health. On July 30, 1908, he succeeded in obtaining a position in the technical department of the Workmen's Accident Insurance Institute for the Kingdom of Bohemia in Prague, having prepared for this job by attending from the beginning of February until the end of May evening courses on workmen's insurance offered

COURTESY MARLBOROUGH GALLERY

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at the Prague Academy of Commerce (Prager Handelsakademie).

The Workmen's Accident Insurance Institute for the Kingdom of Bohemia was a semi-governmental institution, the most important and the largest of seven such entities in Austria, created pursuant to a law of 1887 that an imperial decree made effective in 1889. Owing to the rapidity and the success of Bohemia's industrialization—the "Bohemian miracle"—driven in large part by the talent and the capital of newly emancipated Bohemian Jews, the economy of Bohemia had considerable weight in the empire. In 1911, for example, the Prague Institute insured more than 720,000 workers, or about one-third of Austria's entire industrial capacity.

It was inevitable that the intense scholarly interest in every detail relating Kafka and his sources would extend to the legal documents on which he worked at the Institute. While the Institute's files seem to have survived both the destruction of World War II and the subsequent turmoil in Czechoslovakia and Austria, and are available in state archives in Prague and Vienna, it is not always evident whether Kafka was the author of a particular document. Some were signed by Kafka, but many texts believed to have been written by him were signed by his superiors, as would be normal in a large and rigidly hierarchical organization. Sometimes an attribution is possible because Kafka had referred to a particular document item in his correspondence or diary. In more ambiguous instances, scholars have relied instead on their sense that a particular legal document shows traces of Kafka's style.

Surely the validity of that latter method of attribution is questionable. The employees at the Prague office of the Workmen's Accident Insurance Institute for the Kingdom of Bohemia were, ironically enough, a rather literary group. Eugen Lederer, the director of the accident division, published poetry in Czech. Alois Gütling, who occupied an office adjoining Kafka's and over the course of several years helped him with technical and statistical calculations, published three volumes of poetry in German. The director, Robert Marschner, was passionate about Heine's poetry and was the author of prize-winning studies of Goethe also written in German. There were other highly literate employees of the Institute as well, and it is reasonable to suppose that they were all capable of writing decent German prose.

Moreover, insurance company documents, including those that are known to have been written by Kafka, are of a mind-numbing dullness, a characteristic they share with most legal texts on insurance law and its application. The documents composed by Kafka show certainly that he knew how to marshal and to organize facts, to present arguments, and, within the limits of the particular assignment, to write effectively and clearly about his subject. Given his high intelligence and his mastery of German prose, how could it have been otherwise? But to say that these tedious writings bear the mark of a great master is far-fetched. Indeed, given Kafka's enormous subtlety and skill in expression, he surely found it appropriate, and perhaps even amusing, to conform to the Institute's "house style." Some of the time he was, in effect, writing pastiches.

An introduction to Kafka's office writings has been available to general readers brave enough to wade through opaque legal verbiage since the appearance in 1958 of Klaus Wagenbach's biography of young Kafka, *Franz Kafka: Eine Biographie seiner Jugend (1883-1912)*, or "Franz Kafka: a Biography of his Youth (1883-1912)," which has appended to it three of Kafka's contributions to the Institute's annual reports and an article on workmen's compensation issues that he published in a provincial newspaper. An ample selection of his professional papers can be found in the late Klaus Hermsdorf's German edition of the office writings, which appeared in 1984. Included in it are the heartbreaking letters written by Kafka in the years 1918–1924, requesting ever-longer sick leaves and, in the end, the right to retire by reason of disability. Among other memorabilia of interest are Kafka's university transcript showing the courses he attended, and a detailed tabulation of his promotions and compensation through the last change of status, his retirement. The addressee of the first of the letters occasioned by the progress of his illness is his friend and direct superior Eugen Pfohl, to whom Kafka always referred as his chief. It is dated November 25, 1918. Then, practically overnight, Pfohl and the poetry-loving director of the Institute, Robert Marschner, with whom Kafka used to read Heine, disappeared. They were dismissed from the Institute by the new ethnic Czech majority of the board of directors, and replaced by ethnic Czechs.

All the subsequent letters are in Czech. Although Kafka wrote Czech well, he had these documents reviewed, and sometimes written from scratch, by his ethnic Czech brother-in-law in order to avoid mistakes that might have offended his new superiors who prided themselves on the purity of their Czech.

Hermsdorf's book should serve as a model for such works. His long essay introducing the professional papers is enlightening, modest, refreshingly free of jargon and literary theory, and sensitive to the beauty of Kafka's work. An enlarged and gussied-up critical edition of *Amtliche Schriften* appeared in 2004, with Hermsdorf and Benno Wagner as co-editors. None of these works has been translated into English, and the excellent Wagenbach biography is out of print. But now eighteen of Kafka's professional papers are available in English as *The Office Writings*, a smaller selection than Hermsdorf's, put together by Stanley Corngold, Benno Wagner, and Jack Greenberg, and competently translated by Eric Patton with Ruth Hein. It is at least theoretically possible that a non-professional reader unversed in Kafka's biography may stumble on this work and read it. For this reason, some background information about Kafka and his experience of office life may be useful to such a reader as a vaccine against the claims to be encountered in this book.

Kafka did not become a lawyer because the study of law interested him, or because he had any intention of practicing law. He went to the university because young men of his milieu were expected to get a degree unless they were going into the family business. The latter solution was impossible: as Kafka wrote in his *Letter to His Father*, the result of his father's method of upbringing "was that I fled everything that even remotely reminded me of you." Government service or an academic career were out of the question, because Jews were excluded from them. Medicine was a frequent solution, but Kafka had no talent for the sciences. The fallback career, then as now, was law, and Kafka decided to pursue it, although his lack of enthusiasm continued undiminished. In fact, he suffered his first nervous breakdown after cramming for a final examination in Roman law. And, when he obtained his doctorate, the next step was to find a dignified and secure occupation that would leave him enough time for writing. The job at the Institute met Kafka's conditions, above all because it was on the single shift system: work began at eight and ended at two, leaving what he had hoped would be sufficient time in the afternoon and evening for his true work.

Or that was the theory; but in reality Kafka never stopped believing, with the

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greatest strength of conviction, that the Institute robbed him of the time that he imperiously required if he was to give his full measure as a writer. On December 15, 1910, after a short visit to Berlin, he wrote to Brod: "Not until last night did I begin to dread the office, although then the dread hit me so hard that I felt like hiding under the table." This was not a pose: he genuinely felt trapped. One month later, at the beginning of his third year of work, he wrote to his boss Eugen Pfohl: "When I wanted to get out of bed this morning I simply folded up. This has a simple cause, I am completely overworked. Not by the office but by my other work. The office has an innocent share in it only to the extent that, if I did not have to go there, I could live calmly for my own work and should not have to waste these six hours a day which have tormented me to a degree that you cannot imagine, especially on Friday and Saturday, because I was full of my own things … for me it is a horrible double life from which there is probably no escape but insanity. I write this in the good light of the morning and would certainly not write it if it were not so true and if I did not love you like a son."

The situation was no better the following year. In October, he was dictating a report to the district chief of police, and for a while he froze: "Finally I have the word 'stigmatize' and the appropriate sentence, but still hold it all in my mouth with disgust and a sense of shame as though it were raw meat, cut out of me (such effort it has cost me)." One month later, reflecting bitterly about the inadequacy of a little story of his that Brod had read aloud at a gathering of friends, he explained the reason: "I have too little time and quiet to draw out of me all the possibilities of my talent. For that reason it is only disconnected starts that make an appearance…." Kafka knew that "writing was the most productive direction for my being to take, everything rushed in that direction, and left empty all those abilities which were directed toward the joys of sex, eating, drinking, philosophical reflection, and above all music."

In a sober and even ascetic vein, Kafka wrote to Felice in 1913: "There is never enough time at one's disposal, for the roads are long and it is easy to go astray.… I have often thought that the best mode of life for me would be to sit in the innermost room of a spacious locked cellar with my writing things and a lamp.… And how I would write! From what depths I would drag it up! Without effort! For extreme concentration knows no effort…."

In a letter written the same year to Felice's father, he confessed that "my whole being is directed toward literature; I have followed this direction unswervingly until my 30th year, and the moment I abandon it I cease to live." One can cull similar examples from his diary and his letters in the four years that remained until illness progressively made him unable to continue his work at the office.

Set against this heartbreaking reality, the riffs on Kafka's insurance office "as a conduit of contemporary experience—and hence as an indispensable basis for the dreamlike transmutations of his art," or as a "ministry" that Corngold, in one of his frequent spells of free association, connects with the use of that word by Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, "a work exemplary in the English Romantic tradition not unknown to Kafka," come across as nonsense. This is all the more deplorable because Professor Corngold knows better. He goes on to explain that the word "ministry" in the context of Kafka and Wordsworth is "a doublet of ideas: it defines poetic existence as a passionate reading of signs and connects it, in a certain atmosphere of anxiety, to a powerful social-political agency—indeed, considers poetic existence literally as cooperation with this social-political agency." A little later, on the same page, he continues his commentary:

> Note the fragments of the discourse of work and employment even in this pristine natural scene of reading. Here the word "ministry" chiefly adverts to the idea of precapitalist agencies benevolently—but also threateningly—"administering" lessons through signs made manifest by the cooperation of psychic "faculties." In his 1943 novel *The Ministry of Fear*, Greene restores to Wordsworth's "ministry" its menacing, bureaucratic sense.… Vogl's discussion of Kafka's political grotesque is also apt to Wordsworth here: Kafka's work is "less a disenchantment of the world than a bureaucratization of the heavens."

Kafka was well known for his irrepressible sense of humor, and Brod recalled him laughing so much when he read aloud the first chapter of *The Trial* "that there were moments when he couldn't read any further." One can imagine him guffawing were he to read the passage just quoted.

The same comic muse presides over much of the Corngold, Greenberg, and Wagner volume. No one in Kafka's lifetime, and none of Kafka's biographers, has suggested that, until his health broke down, Kafka was anything but a thoroughly conscientious and productive employee. He was liked by his colleagues and his superiors, and there is no reason to doubt that he knew that his work for the Institute was valued. Thus, in the fall of 1912, at the beginning of his relationship with Felice, he wrote to correct her misimpression: "We haven't got seventy departments; rather, in the department I am in there are seventy clerks. The head of this department has three assistants, and one of these, unfortunately the one who deals with the most important or rather the most unpleasant matters, is myself."

The history of his promotions is sufficient proof that his work was appreciated. He started out as a temporary employee (*Aushilfsbeamter*) in the summer of 1908, and fourteen months later his employment was made permanent. In 1910, he became a *Concipist*, an untranslatable title signifying that he was an employee with legal training who could draft legal documents and had moved one rung higher on the career ladder. In 1913, he was promoted to the position of vice secretary (*Vizesekretär*) and, in 1920, to that of secretary (*Anstaltssekretär*). Then astonishingly, in 1922, before he was pensioned off for medical reasons, he was made a senior secretary (*Obersekretär*), a sign of favor that ignored his increasingly frequent and prolonged absences on medical leave.

These "secretary" titles, literal and correct translations from German, are unavoidably misleading. Kafka and his fellow "secretaries" at the Insurance Institute had none of the responsibilities of the secretary of an American or British company. They were legally trained officials—we would call them in-house lawyers—handling such matters as the evaluation and disposal of claims, and certain kinds of litigation. To proclaim, in opposition to Miłosz's beautiful formulation, which anoints Kafka "the secretary of the invisible," that "for us [Corngold, Greenberg, and Wagner] he is just as centrally the Chief Legal Secretary of the Workmen's Accident Insurance Institute for the Kingdom of Bohemia in Prague" is fatuous—Kafka was given that position in February 1922 and retired on July 1, and he was one of several officials with that title—and tone deaf.

The hype continues with talk of Kafka's "most remarkable professional career," and references to him as a "special agent" for Dr. Marschner's "reform projects," and praise for his volunteering for military service in 1915 "as "a heroic option." We are told that "during the war

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years [Kafka] was [the Institute's] virtual CEO." A virtual CEO, indeed: he was on the verge of a nervous breakdown most of 1915, and, after the hemorrhage he suffered in August 1917, was more often absent from the Institute than present at his desk. In fact, in October or November 1917 (the letter has not been dated more precisely), he wrote to his friend Oskar Baum refusing to recommend the claims of a blinded veteran to the Insurance Institute: "I simply cannot write to Director Marschner. It's been more than three months since he has heard a peep from me; he enters my life only as a kind Providence, endlessly forbearing and patient and paying the bill."

As the documents collected in *The Office Writings* show, Kafka worked on a broad variety of matters. There is a panegyric welcoming Robert Marschner as the new director of the Institute; long sections of annual reports of the Institute; polemical memoranda concerning such matters as the scope of compulsory insurance for building trades, the fixing of insurance premiums, and the inclusion of private automobiles in the category of enterprises that require insurance; his well-known paper on preventing accidents in the use of wood-planing machinery; memoranda in a couple of interminable contested cases; the jubilee report for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Institute; and appeals for the creation of a public psychiatric hospital in wartime Bohemia and aid to disabled veterans. The encomium to Marschner, written in 1909, when the twenty-five-year-old Kafka was a new employee, surprises one by the flat-footed and quite embarrassing piling-on of flatteries. It makes for strange reading when one remembers how Kafka burst into laughter as he listened to a speech eulogizing Dr. Otto Příbram, his school friend's father, through whose influence he was hired by the Institute. He would have laughed even harder at Corngold, Greenberg, and Wagner's assessment of the value of this early effort:

> This short laudatio suggests the importance of Kafka's professional work as a reservoir of poetic ideas. The constellations of individuals, machines, and institutions organizing most of his narratives are, in many instances, prefigured in his office writings. This inaugural speech, for example, contains a core model of the constellation Kafka constructs in "In the Penal Colony" of 1914. The New Commandant, who is trying to run the colony more rationally and efficiently than had the Old Commandant, occupies the position of Robert Marschner, who is taking pains, on a broad canvas, to change the old ways of his predecessor … Egon [sic in the text, Pfohl's name was Eugen] Pfohl, head of the Institute's operations department and Kafka's immediate superior [to whom Kafka wrote that he loved him like a son], who had begun his career in the Austrian army, resembles the officer trying to keep the machine—that is: the Institute—running as it used to.… Marschner's opponents, who existed as an unlikely possibility, anticipates [sic!] that sorry lot of phantasmatic opponents of the New Commandant, who carry the officer's vain hopes for a return of the old regime.

Or would he have had his best laugh hearing how "more than once in this collection of official documents … the narrative voices of Kafka the clerk and Kafka the writer intersect, or, indeed, merge"?

The Corngold, Greenberg, and Wagner volume is a *sottisier* of such richness that the temptation to hold up for view its gems, one by one, is difficult to resist. A word must be said, however, about the overall quality of the office writings assembled here. The weightiest of them, for instance the interminable speech that Kafka appears to have written for delivery by Dr. Marschner at the Second International Congress on Accident Prevention and First Aid held in Vienna in the summer of 1913—the proceedings bored Kafka to tears—show a fine ability to organize and to present large bodies of tedious information. The other side of that coin is that each of his papers is about three times as long as it should be in order to achieve the most effective exposition and advocacy.

Does Kafka's genius shine through these papers? Certainly not. How could it? But there are moments of strange, otherworldly naïveté, as when Kafka, in a paper on setting insurance premiums and the need to convince employers of the Institute's prudence, opines that "a handsome sum is certainly appropriate as compensation for accidents that have serious consequences, and no employer will even consider advocating parsimony in such cases."

More important perhaps than any of the defects so far alluded to is the editors' reductionist lack of understanding of the creative process, a failing that is in odd contrast with their wild flights of fancy and free association. For instance:

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Kafka worked on prevention of accidents in quarries. Aha! say the editors: here is the birth of the last scene of *The Trial*, in which the executioners place Joseph K. on a loose stone before thrusting the butcher's knife into his heart. Really? What about the innumerable paintings of the sacrifice of Isaac, and indeed the Biblical text of this shattering episode, in which the boy is laid across a boulder? And what about Kafka's personal obsession with knife thrusts and butchering?

Or Kafka's writings on problems of automobile insurance. Aha! say the editors: here is the genesis of the traffic jam in *Amerika*. But what about the Skoda factory that was manufacturing cars which were the pride of Bohemia, or the description in Kafka's travel diary of the traffic on a Paris boulevard including an accident that involved an automobile and a tricycle, or the fascination that the automobile held for young men of that era? Or again: Kafka owned a book about trench warfare. Aha! Here is the material he used in "The Burrow," the brilliant story of the perhaps paranoid animal maintaining his underground keep, and waiting apprehensively for the enemy.

One can readily stipulate, to use a lawyer's word, that the experiences, direct and vicarious, that Kafka stored up during his work for the Institute nourished his fiction. How could it be otherwise? He wrote out of his life. But Kafka was a writer of genius, with an almost inconceivable plenitude of imagination. It is simplistic, to put it mildly, to reduce his literary astonishments to his work as an insurance lawyer.

Still, there is something to be said for this book—a contribution to knowledge beyond its playful puns, such as calling what was probably a slip of the pen in a petition drafted by a provincial Austrian lawyer (he had written *Gesetzt* or set down, instead of *Gesetz*, or the law) a Derridean rather than a Freudian mistake. Or informing the reader that "if Michel Foucault has read Flaubert's oeuvre as a 'fantastic library'—writing spurred not by the author's imagination but by knowledge stored in libraries and archives and bent, thereafter, on reorganizing this knowledge into a surface of literary images—then Kafka's work can be read as a 'fantastic' office." One of the editors is Jack Greenberg, a law professor at Columbia and a very distinguished civil rights lawyer, He is not a Kafka scholar. As he engagingly confesses in his acknowledgments, he has "of course, depended on Stanley Corngold and Benno Wagner, as should anyone who seeks to understand Kafka's writings and life.... I liberally cribbed from their writings...." But Greenberg's independent research has produced a set of diverting statistics that confirm one's worst fears: the word "Kafkaesque" is in wide use by American judges. It has appeared in 240 lower court opinions; five times in opinions of justices of the Supreme Court; and, in other contexts, 455 to 669 times per year between 2002 and 2006. This, too, is a joke that Kafka would have enjoyed. ◆

Samuel D. Kassow

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

GHETTOSTADT: ŁÓDZ AND THE MAKING OF A NAZI CITY
By Gordon J. Horwitz
(Harvard University Press, 395 pp., $29.95)

I.

Not so long ago many historians saw Nazism mainly as a revolt against modernity, a call for a return to soil and Volk. Gordon Horwitz's book on wartime Lodz lends support to what has become a new scholarly consensus about the Third Reich: that it looked forward, not back. Hitler promised to build a new Germany that offered social benefits, educational opportunities, and cities that combined the benefits of modernity and technology with a proper regard for aesthetics, health, and culture. This new Germany would harness science—especially the biological sciences—to create a racially superior nation. Needless to say, such a vision had no place for Jews.

In this rich and suggestive book, Horwitz tells a tale of two cities: Litzmannstadt, the Nazi name for Lodz, which was to be a model for a German future, and the Ghetto, a doomed remnant of a sordid past. The two were linked: for Litzmannstadt to succeed, the Ghetto and its Jews had to disappear, and the sooner the better. Good urban planning, not to mention a basic concern for health and aesthetics, had to protect German citizens from vermin and Jews. It is unclear why Horwitz chose to tell a tale of two cities rather than three. After all, the Poles also had a story. The Germans murdered or deported the Polish intelligentsia in Lodz and encouraged many eligible Poles to claim status as *Volksdeutsche*, or ethnic Germans. But the Nazis could not do without Polish labor, and so throughout the occupation the Poles remained a sizeable part of this new German city-in-the-making.

Horwitz is hardly the first historian to examine the Lodz ghetto. No ghetto left more documentation: official German archives, administrative ghetto records, contemporaneous diaries. The Germans left Lodz in a hurry and had little time to destroy their records. Jewish archivists and chroniclers also buried a great deal of material, including the amazing Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto. And since it was the last ghetto to suffer liquidation, more Jews survived to write memoirs than anywhere else. Superb monographs by Michal Unger and Andrea Löw have added to what we already knew about the ghetto from the work of Lucjan Dobroszycki, Isaiah Trunk, and Icchak Rubin.

What makes Horwitz's book so illuminating is his urban perspective. He tells how mass murder unfolded in the context of a particular city: the Nazi Litzmannstadt, the Polish Łódź, the Jewish Lodz. Like many other cities in Eastern Europe—Vilnius/Wilno/Vilne/Vil'nya or Lemberg/Lwów/Lviv/Lemberik—Lodz was once a rich multi-ethnic society in which clashing and converging memories produced a volatile mix of familiarity and suspicion, of easygoing neighborly tolerance and deep-seated prejudice. The mass murder, ethnic cleansings, and forced re-settlements of the twentieth century turned these diverse cities into ethnically homogenous places. But each of them had its own story. What made Lodz different was that it was the only major city in the expanded Reich where an already sizeable German population shared the same space with a large number of Poles and with close to two hundred thousand Jews (who were markedly different from their acculturated and middle-class co-religionists in Germany). For the Nazis,

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this stark clash of rising Germandom with the masses of Ostjuden provided an ideal object lesson in the centrality of race politics as a pitiless zero-sum game. And as the example of Lodz shows, one did not have to be an actual perpetrator to enjoy the benefits of genocide: new apartments, gleaming parks, cut-rate goods on sale, excellent stores up for new ownership.

Before the war, Lodz was the second largest city in Poland. It was a sprawling, brash industrial town of about 600,000 inhabitants, according to the 1931 census—59 percent were Poles, 32 percent were Jews, and 9 percent were German. Lodz was known as the "Polish Manchester," an ugly scramble of large and small textile mills, of enormous palaces and appalling slums. It was a town that inspired important novels—Wladyslaw Reymont's *Promised Land* in Polish, I. J. Singer's *The Brothers Ashkenazi* in Yiddish—whose themes were strikingly similar: class tension, ethnic strife, the harsh tensions of bare-knuckled capitalism. Both Reymont and Singer described the *Lodzhermensch*, a word that was the same in German and in Yiddish. The *Lodzhermenschen*—mostly Germans and Jews—were the entrepreneurs and the hustlers who built up the city in the nineteenth century, who made and lost huge fortunes, who started big factories and sometimes burned them down to collect insurance. Some of the *Lodzhermenschen* turned into legendary businessmen, such as the German Karl Scheibler and the Jew Izrael Poznanski, who endowed hospitals and religious institutions and patronized the arts.

Over time Lodz also became a major cultural center, the home of great Yiddish and Hebrew writers, of actors and artists such as Moshe Broderson, Yisroel Rabon, Shimon Dzigan, Yitzhak Katzenelson, and Julian Tuwim, a Lodz Jew who wrote in Polish and is remembered as one of Poland's finest poets of the last century. Artur Rubenstein was born in the city. Like Chicago, many intellectuals and artists came to love their raw, unfinished town. They took a perverse pride in its newness, its lack of tradition.

On September 8, 1939, just one week after Germany invaded Poland, Lodz fell. The Nazis annexed the city and its surrounding area to the Reich and called it the Reichsgau Wartheland, run by the cruel and corrupt Arthur Greiser. Long before the Nazis decided to implement the Final Solution, Lodz already became a kind of test case, a model of how to deal with Jews who dared to live in German space.

II.

On a beautiful autumn day in 1941, a German film crew arrived in Litzmannstadt to record the heroic saga of this new Nazi city rising from the dump heap of the past. The crew started shooting near a new water park, surrounded by streets bearing such wondrous names as Rumpelstiltskin, Cinderella, and Hansel and Gretel. In the coming weeks it would film green zones, parks, theaters, schools, new housing projects for German refugees from the East, sporting events. The crew slowly assembled a stirring account of an urban miracle, a living example of how National Socialism would renew the German people. In these new eastern marches of the Reich, just annexed from a defeated Poland, this city would exemplify the promise of the Nazi future: modern, beautiful, a home to new German settlers from the East, a bulwark of German culture and German values.

Horwitz describes many milestones in the rise of this new Nazi town: the opening of a new German theater, a performance of *Don Giovanni*, a wonderful staging of *Faust*. The Nazis went to great lengths to foster a proper appreciation for the hallmarks of German culture. When Bernhard Rust, the Nazi education minister, dropped in on a gymnasium class that was studying *Faust*, he told the students to remember Goethe's message: "He alone wins freedom and life who conquers it every day." Life is a constant test, Rust taught them, "with no pity or mercy for the weak."

As ordinary Germans enjoyed the benefits of their new Nazi city, they did not have to think too much about the mass murder of the Jews. It began in 1941. By December 1941, transports of Jews from the Warthegau were rolling toward the gas trucks of nearby Chelmno. "Our inborn tact," as SS Reichsführer Himmler would say in a speech in 1943, ensured that the work of the Final Solution could proceed with a minimum of blather and garish publicity. To be sure, in the first months of the occupation much dirty work took place in full view of the citizens of Litzmannstadt: the burnings of the synagogues, the mass arrest of Jewish intellectuals at the Astoria café, the public shooting of hundreds of Jews in March 1940, the vicious beatings of frightened Jews stampeded into the ghetto. But after the establishment of the ghetto in April 1940, Litzmannstadt Germans could build for their future and not have their dreams interrupted by the reality of the Jews and their destruction.

Those few Germans who had to come into daily contact with Jews were issued extra pay and extra soap to protect themselves from dirt and contagion. Essential business between the ghetto and the city was transacted in a "neutral zone" to which only a few had access. Wagons that carried goods in and out of the ghetto changed drivers, so that non-Jews did not come in and Jews did not get out. Of course, the Germans directly involved in the ghetto administration enjoyed certain benefits that made up for their exposure to Jews. There were copious presents to take home to the family in Germany and privileged access to the warehouses that stored the better Jewish property.

The Jews themselves were now mostly hidden from view, behind a barbed wire enclosure that sealed off the ghetto from the outside world. German police routinely shot Jews who wandered too close to the fence, and sometimes even German officials complained about the trigger-happy policemen who took their target practice a little too often. In other parts of occupied Poland, intrepid Jewish couriers often filtered in and out of ghettos carrying money, news, and weapons, but not in Lodz. In 1944, a report from an underground Jewish National Committee in Warsaw told Jewish organizations abroad that all attempts to penetrate the ghetto and establish contacts with its inhabitants had failed. This was just one of many reasons that no resistance movement developed in the Lodz ghetto, even though before the war Lodz Jewry enjoyed the reputation as one of the most combative Jewish communities in Eastern Europe.

The Nazis planned to make Litzmannstadt entirely Judenrein as early as 1940, but that had to wait. When the Lodz ghetto was first decreed in February 1940, it was meant to be a transitional holding pen for Jews to be shoved out of the Wartheland and into the Generalgouvernement, the bailiwick of Hans Frank, who governed occupied Poland. As Horwitz and other scholars show, Gauleiter Arthur Greiser, with Himmler's support, wanted the Warthegau to become a model, a laboratory, of ethnic cleansing and racial transformation, where massive deportations of Poles and Jews would allow for a large influx of ethnic Germans. Friedrich Uebelhoer, the *Regierungspraesident*, likened the Jews to a "pestilential boil" who could be "burned off without a trace."

But Hans Frank did not want his kingdom to become a dumping ground for Jews, and other Nazi schemes for the elimination of the Jews, such as the

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Madagascar Plan, also went nowhere. After an initial spate of deportations of Poles and Jews into the GG in 1939 and early 1940, Frank prevailed on Hitler to call a halt. So the German rulers of the Wartheland had to rely on Hitler's assurances that final victory would allow them to get rid of the Jews. In the meantime the local Nazis hit on a stopgap measure: a ghetto in a run-down area in the northern part of the city that included Baluty, the Old Town, and semi-rural Marysin.

Ghettoization in Lodz, as elsewhere, was an ugly business, and the Jews arrived in their new "homes" traumatized and largely dispossessed. On March 6 and 7, 1940, the Germans murdered hundreds of Jews in the city in order to hasten the stampede of Jews into the ghetto area. By the end of April the ghetto was closed, and 167,000 Jews were pushed into an area of about four square kilometers. (Tens of thousands of Jews, including much of the intellectual and economic elite, had already fled the city for Warsaw and points east.) The population density in this slum was seven times the pre-war level; there were few homes equipped with modern plumbing, and the area lacked a modern sewage system. But the ghetto would last much longer than the Germans expected. Britain refused to surrender, the war dragged on, and the Lodz Jews turned out to be a valuable labor pool. Many Germans greedily exploited the ghetto to line their own pockets and thereby protect themselves from a trip to the Eastern Front.

It would be a mistake to see the Lodz ghetto, or indeed any of the hundreds of ghettos that the Nazis created in occupied Eastern Europe, as merely an antechamber to the death camps. In fact, the ghettos in Poland were unprecedented phenomena, neither normal communities nor concentration camps.

The ghettos were quite varied, and these differences stemmed from many factors. What was the nature of local Jewish society before the war? Was the ghetto located in the Generalgouvernement, in the Reich, or in the newly occupied eastern territories? What were the aims of the local German authorities and how much power did they have? Did an economic base and a skilled labor force facilitate the development of workshops and industry? Was the ghetto economy centralized or was there room for "private enterprise"? What room for maneuver did the local Jewish leadership have? How much of the pre-war leadership strata remained? Did the local Judenrat enjoy the confidence of the ghetto inhabitants, and did it have a leader who could convince the Jews that labor might save them? Was the ghetto "open" or "closed"? How much information came in from the outside, and from other ghettos? Did the ghetto contain a critical mass of elites, writers, intellectuals and activists to organize cultural and political activities? Did it have a core of youth movement activists? How did the ghetto organize and control the critical functions of relief?

Questions, questions. No two ghettos were alike. The Lodz, or Litzmannstadt, ghetto had many unique features. It was the second largest ghetto in Nazi-occupied Poland. It was a "work ghetto" where, by 1944, almost all of the Jews were employed in shops, or *ressorts*, that produced for the Germans. It was one of the first ghettos that the Nazis established and it was the last ghetto that they liquidated. And the Lodz ghetto also provides a case study of a key aspect of the unfolding of the Final Solution, how policy toward the Jews was shaped by an interplay of local pressures and decisions made in Berlin.

The Lodz ghetto was constantly "in play," its fate always subjected to power struggles that took place in the higher levels of the Nazi hierarchy and in the lower spheres of the Lodz city administration. Many German agencies fought for the chance to exploit and to rob the Lodz Jews: Albert Speer's armaments ministry, the Chief Bureau of Economic Administration (WHVA) of the SS, the local German Kripo (Criminal Police), the tax authorities of the Ministry of Finance, the Lodz City Government, Hans Biebow's Ghetto Administration, and Gauleiter Arthur Greiser, who tucked away sizable sums from the Lodz ghetto into his own personal coffers. Mordecai Haim Rumkowski, the "Elder of the Jews," was quite aware of these internecine German tensions, and nurtured the hope that they might buy him and the Lodz Jews some precious time. Rumkowski was indeed able to buy time, until August 1944. He paid a heavy price.

At first the Germans paid little attention to such details as feeding or employing the Jews. German officials such as Alexander Palfinger, who worked in the city's Food Supply and Economic Office, believed that the more the Jews starved, the faster they would cough up the riches that they had allegedly squirreled away. At any rate, as Palfinger wrote, "the rapid dying out of the Jews is for us a matter of total indifference, if not to say desirable, as long as the concomitant effects leave the public interest of the German people untouched. . . ." Palfinger's superior in the ghetto section of the Food Supply and Economic Office, Hans Biebow, was more of a pragmatist. Why starve the Jews when they could work? Biebow realized that Palfinger greatly overestimated the Jews' loot, especially since the German Criminal Police was diligently robbing Jews of whatever wealth they managed to hide. The Kripo used an elaborate network of Jewish informers and tortured any Jew suspected of hiding valuables. (Dr. Walter Zirpins supervised the torture chambers and went on to enjoy a distinguished postwar career as a criminologist in West Germany.)

Perhaps, Biebow reasoned, the Jews could work to earn money to pay for the ghetto—and even leave some extra wealth for the German war economy and local officials as well. But it was not so simple to just put the victims to work. Since the outbreak of the war, the Germans had systematically looted the Jewish economy and had confiscated many machines and tools. Biebow knew that he would have to get his superiors to reverse course, and start investing in the Jews. By October 1940, the resourceful Biebow had managed to convince his superiors to set up a work ghetto.

One of the more fascinating sub-stories of the Lodz ghetto is the tenure of this slick and successful coffee merchant from Bremen who, between 1940 and 1944, ran the Gettoverwaltung, the ghetto administration that was formally part of the Litzmannstadt Food Supply and Economic Office. For some time Biebow had a correct, even polite relationship with Rumkowski, and he could be charming with other Jewish subordinates. After the dapper Biebow returned from home leave in 1940, he brought back gifts of coffee for Rumkowski's Jewish secretaries. Certainly Biebow did not initiate the deportations to the death camps. Yet he adapted to the Final Solution with remarkable ease. He visited Chelmno, rampaged through the ghetto with a pistol during the roundups in September 1942, and in 1944 deceived the Lodz Jews by telling them that they were going to labor camps, not to Auschwitz-Birkenau. As for his relationship with Rumkowski, by June 1944 it had "progressed" to the point where he strode into Rumkowski's office and beat him so badly that he was sent to the hospital. Two months later he put Rumkowski on a train bound for Auschwitz. At about the same time, Biebow sexually attacked a young Jewish girl, shot her in the eye, and then personally deported her family.

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But for a long time Biebow and Rumkowski shared a common goal: to establish a "work ghetto." At first Biebow had a hard time selling ghetto production to German clients, but as he traveled through the Reich and put his talents as a salesman and a businessman to good use, skepticism about Jewish labor soon gave way to a flood of orders from the Wehrmacht and other buyers. The combination of Biebow's commercial skills, Rumkowski's organizational abilities, and Lodz's proletarian character, which ensured a large, skilled labor force, led to the establishment of an economic network that by 1943 was making a significant contribution to the German war economy.

Starting from a modest base in the spring of 1940, the ghetto had 117 different workshops, factories and other enterprises by 1943. This growth took place despite staggering difficulties: hunger, and shortages of machinery and materials. As the SS ramped up its pressure in 1943 to liquidate the ghetto and send the workers and machinery to SS work camps around Lublin, Biebow enlisted some formidable allies to protect his ghetto from Himmler's encroachments, including the Wehrmacht, Albert Speer, and the notorious Gauleiter Arthur Greiser.

But only useful Jews, Jews who worked, would remain. In the course of 1942, more than seventy-one thousand ghetto inhabitants were deported to Chelmno. And as the Israeli scholar Michal Unger has observed, these deportations made the remaining Jews in the ghetto more likely to believe Mordechai Haim Rumkowski's claim that only work could save the seventy thousand Jews who were left.

III.

Few Jewish leaders under Nazi occupation have been more controversial than Mordecai Haim Rumkowski. Before World War I Rumkowski, who was born in 1877, had moved to Lodz from the small town of Ilino in White Russia, and tried his hand at various business ventures with varying degrees of success. Lacking any systematic education beyond the traditional *heder*, Rumkowski nonetheless demonstrated a great deal of energy and ambition. He dabbled in local Zionist politics, quarreled with his comrades, and distinguished himself through his stewardship of one of the largest Jewish orphanages in Poland, in Helenówek. Opinions about the pre-war Rumkowski were decidedly mixed. His detractors noted his ambition, his coarseness, his lack of culture. He got along in various languages but Yiddish was the only one that he spoke well. Some whispered about allegations of sexual improprieties, rumors that Rumkowski molested young girls in the orphanage. He also had his defenders who cited his energy and his administrative talents.

Rumkowski became even more controversial after the Germans appointed him Elder of the Jews in 1939. At first the local German authorities found it convenient to humor their "Jewish Elder" with an illusion of "autonomy," and Rumkowski set out to establish the most regimented and most organized ghetto in Eastern Europe. His "Council of Elders," the local version of the Judenrat, wielded more control over ghetto life than anywhere else in Poland. While smuggling helped to feed the ghettos in Warsaw and Vilna, smuggling in Lodz had practically stopped by 1941, and private trade, unlike the case in Warsaw, was of minimal importance. The food supply depended almost entirely on supervised allotments of German supplies. Unlike the Warsaw ghetto, there was no *Aleynhilf*, or Jewish Self-Help, an umbrella organization that supervised relief and was based on a vast network of a thousand house committees.

Rumkowski took great pride in his tightly controlled ghetto. He boasted that it "worked like a clock." On a "state visit" to the Warsaw ghetto in 1941, he lectured the Judenrat there on how they could learn from Lodz. The head of the Warsaw Judenrat, Adam Czerniakow, loathed him. In his diary he noted that Rumkowski was

Vita Contemplativa

It may already be September. I drank tasteless coffee
in the café garden of the Museum-Insel
and thought about Berlin, its dark waters.
Black buildings that have seen so much.
But peace reigns in Europe, diplomats doze,
a pale sun, the summer dies serenely,
spiders weave its shining shroud, the plane trees'
dry leaves write memoirs of their youth.

So this is the *vita contemplativa*.
The black walls enclosing white sculptures.
The bust of a Greek beauty. So this is it.
An altar before which no one prays.
So this is the *vita contemplativa*.
Narkissos—a Roman copy of a Greek boy
on prosthetic limbs of bronze (a veteran of which war?).
Then a *kuros* with his pouch of testes (a vanished *phallus*).

We seem to occupy a desert island.
Time moves deliberately, without haste.
Helpless rapture, so this is the *vita contemplativa*.
Bliss. An instant with no hour, as the poet said,
the poet killed in Lublin by a bomb.
But what if, in this or a different city,
the *vita activa* surged again, what would Artemis,
fourth century B.C.E., do then? Hermes? Narcissus?

Parchment faces stare at me with envy—
I still make mistakes, they can't.
Comparing day and night, so this is it.
Sleep and waking, mind and world, this is it. Joy.
Tranquility, taut attention, the levitating heart.
Lucent thoughts smoulder in black walls.
So this is it. What it is, we do not know.
We dwell in the abyss. In dark waters. In brightness.

ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI

Translated from the Polish by Clare Cavanagh

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"replete with self-praise, a conceited and witless man, and a dangerous man, too, since he keeps telling the authorities that all is well in his preserve."

When Rumkowski returned to Lodz, he spread the word that, compared to Warsaw, his Jews were lucky. In Lodz one did not see the conspicuous inequalities of the Warsaw ghetto, where thousands died in the streets while a wealthy few gorged themselves in fancy nightclubs. Thanks to his tight control, the Lodz ghetto indeed boasted fewer social disparities than the Warsaw ghetto, even if a small elite close to Rumkowski did enjoy better rations and living conditions. But in the final analysis, while the Lodz ghetto may have been more "equal," it was just as deadly. The mortality rate in the Lodz ghetto was the highest of any major ghetto. Between 1940 and 1944, 43,743 died of starvation and disease, 21 percent of all the original ghetto inhabitants.

Rumkowski ruled with a strong hand, and the Jews in the ghetto hated him, and feared him, and also accorded him a grudging respect. "King Haim" seemed to be everywhere. Power gave him energy. An older man of sixty-three when the war began, Rumkowski began to look decidedly younger as he rode through the ghetto in his horse-drawn carriage. He sported gleaming black boots and an assortment of handsome vests, and his mane of tousled white hair set off a face that seemed tanned and healthy. In a short time he married a woman thirty years his junior, although he apparently continued to pressure other women for sexual favors. He organized soup kitchens, established workshops, raised cash, received visiting German delegations with lavish albums that highlighted the ghetto's productive achievements.

Rumkowski had one message for the Lodz Jews: that his "factories" gave them their only chance to survive. When the Germans allowed it he made heroic efforts to establish schools, give children extra food, and provide Zionist youth groups with allotments of land to prepare for a future life in Palestine. He protected rabbis, promoted Yiddish in the schools, and saved many writers and intellectuals from deportation. Rumkowski, who was himself childless, organized the best school system in any ghetto, and even his enemies grudgingly admitted his genuine concern for the welfare of the ghetto's children.

But Rumkowski's illusion of "autonomy" steadily evaporated. An early blow was the sudden announcement, in the fall of 1941, that Rumkowski had to make room for 20,000 Jewish deportees from the Reich and the Protectorate (the present-day Czech Republic), as well as 5,000 gypsies. To accommodate the influx Rumkowski had to close down his beloved schools. In early January 1942, the Germans informed Rumkowski that it was necessary to shrink the population of the ghetto, and he could, if he wished, make up the lists of the deportees. Rumkowski believed, as did some other Judenrat leaders, that in this case it was preferable for Jews to control the deportations rather than to entrust the job to the tender mercies of the Germans. He took advantage of these deportations to rid himself of welfare cases, the unemployed, and people that he regarded as troublemakers, including some underworld figures. Did he know that the deportees were going to Chelmno? In January 1942, perhaps not. But by May, when the Germans demanded another reduction in the size of the ghetto and Rumkowski ordered the deportation of most of the Jews who had arrived from Central Europe, there could be no doubt that he knew about their ultimate fate.

Worse followed. Like a bolt from the blue, the Germans demanded in September 1942 that Rumkowski help to deport all children under the age of ten and all adults over sixty-five. The Germans gave Rumkowski no warning when they descended on the ghetto hospital and brutally collected the patients. On September 4, Rumkowski stood before the ghetto with a bitter message: Jews had to hand over their children and their aged parents.

> A terrible blow has befallen the ghetto. They are demanding from us the most precious thing that we have—the children and the elderly. I never was worthy of having a child of my own so I dedicated the best years of my life to the children.... I never imagined that I would have to deliver this sacrifice to the altar. In my old age I must stretch out my arms to you and cry: Fathers and mothers, give me your children!... I must cut off limbs in order to save the body. I must hand over the children and if not, they will take others as well. (terrible wailing).... If we hand over the victims ourselves, there will be quiet (cries heard: "let us all go." "Mister President, do not take only children but take one child from families that have many children)." These are stupid phrases. I do not have the strength to argue with you.

The Germans sealed off the ghetto record office to keep parents from changing their children's birthdates. Anxious to secure milk rations for their children, many parents had registered them as younger than they were, and now they paid a bitter price. That week the Germans proclaimed a *Gehsperre*, a total curfew. No one was allowed in the street. Germans and Jewish police went from apartment to apartment, with lists of children and the elderly. An eleven-year-old could stay, while nine-year-olds were ripped from their parents' arms. Parents fought back, and tried to hide their children. Many mothers committed suicide. One woman carefully sewed a message into her little girl's coat, asking whoever found the girl to take care of her.

Meanwhile the Germans thoughtfully allowed the Jewish police and high ghetto officials to shelter their own children in a special building. Horwitz is quite effective in drawing a stark contrast between the ruthless murder of the Jewish children and the care and concern that the Germans showed for their own children. There were day camps just outside the city, where German children hiked and played. The deportation of the Jewish children coincided with athletic events and games on the other side of the fence.

Even for a ghetto used to horror and trauma, the week of September 5–12, 1942, was a special time of torture and agony. Rumkowski sat locked up in his office. During the week of the *Gehsperre*, when Jews were confined to their homes, he did not appear in public. And after September 1942, Rumkowski's power markedly declined. Little remained of the "autonomy" that he had tried to develop. He was bypassed in the management of the *ressorts*, and in the distribution of food, and Biebow over-ruled many of his decisions. He continued to be the butt of bitter songs and angry lampoons. And yet the Jews of the Lodz ghetto knew that no one could really take Rumkowski's place. Long gone were the days when angry Bundist demonstrators demanded, as they had in 1940, that direct German control of the ghetto would be better than Rumkowski's despotic caprice. When Rumkowski was summoned to Gestapo headquarters in December 1943, the ghetto trembled in fear. When he returned, most of the Jews breathed a sigh of relief.

To hand over Jewish children was the line that Adam Czerniakow, the head of the Warsaw Judenrat, refused to cross,

ANTHONY RUSSO

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and he took his own life. But as Rumkowski reminded the ghetto Jews, and they needed no reminding, Czerniakow's suicide had absolutely no impact on the fate of Warsaw Jewry—while he, Rumkowski, would do what was necessary to save a remnant. Let the Jews judge him after the war. He was ready to face their verdict! After all, did any of his critics suggest an alternative? When he gave those same critics the chance to take the names of their party comrades off the deportation lists, did any of them refuse to do so—even though they knew that to save a friend meant that another Jew would take his place?

After the nightmare of the *gehsperre*, the ghetto "enjoyed" almost two years of relative quiet. Jews starved, but somehow most managed to stay alive. And the front came closer and closer. By July, 1944 the Russians had reached the Vistula, only sixty miles away. At night the Lodz Jews could hear the distant thump of heavy artillery. And then the end came. Hans Biebow assured the Lodz Jews that they would leave the ghetto for work in the Reich, but the trains took them to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Rumkowski arrived at Auschwitz in one of the last transports.

About 200,000 Jews passed through the Lodz ghetto. Of these, 43,743 died of sickness and hunger. Fifteen thousand were deported to labor camps, where most of them died. Eight thousand were deported to Chelmno in 1942, and for a short period in 1944. Sixty-seven thousand were sent to Auschwitz in August 1944. At that late date, about one in three Jews were selected for forced labor, while the rest were gassed. All in all, about seven thousand to ten thousand survived.

After the war, Jewish historians such as Philip Friedman savagely criticized Rumkowski as a Jewish fascist:

> The pseudo-saviors of the ghettoes were consciously or unconsciously influenced by the great messianic craze of the fascists, and aspired to be saviors of their people in ways that were devoid of Jewish spirit. They were ruthless men who ruled, like their Nazi masters, by coercion. They believed that they would manage to save at least a portion of their people by autocratic deeds in the spirit of the German Führer.

Isaiah Trunk judged Rumkowski harshly in 1962 in his book on the Lodz ghetto, but he later softened his opinion. In his monumental work *Judenrat*, which appeared in 1972, Trunk made a distinction between "collaboration" and "cooperation," between willing identification with Nazi aims and working with the Nazis because there was no alternative. In that sense, Rumkowski cooperated but he was not a collaborator.

Over the years, historians have tended to moderate their opinions of Rumkowski. More positive appraisals began to appear. The educator and writer Natan Eck asserted after the war that much of the criticism leveled at Rumkowski was misplaced: "He was a strange man, somewhat ridiculous but he did what was possible, under these conditions to save Jews.... Nothing could have succeeded with the Germans. But he made an attempt.... I think that Rumkowski's intentions were essentially good."

But the final word belongs to Horowitz, whose wise assessment concludes his very important book:

> Rumkowski and his strategy succeeded in saving a small number. And some among the fortunate attributed their survival largely to his efforts. He was not a likable man, was egotistical to be sure and as one survivor termed him, "a boor." One can imagine others more honorable. No doubt had he chosen defiance we would honor him today, and memorial candles would be lit in his memory. His efforts led to failure. But compliance under circumstances of extreme coercion is not the same as collaboration. Rumkowski did not hasten to do the Germans' bidding, nor did he act out of a desire to reap material advantages for himself; neither did he share their convictions, nor most assuredly, did he seek the destruction of the people over whom he held restricted sway. No judgment should overlook for a moment that, ultimately, it was the Nazi leadership that sought that destruction, developed the means to bring it about, and exercised the overwhelming instruments of deception and coercion at their disposal to bring about its accomplishment.

IV.

After the war, for the first time in its history, Lodz became an ethnically homogenous city. The Poles expelled most of the Germans who had not already fled, and few Jewish survivors chose to stay. Communist Poland paid little attention to Lodz's multi-ethnic past as it put forward a new version of the city: proud, proletarian, socialist—and Polish. The authorities built ugly workers' housing blocks and cheap stores, even as they razed many of landmark buildings of the pre-World War I Golden Age. Lodz remained the ugly duckling of Polish cities. It did not figure in the guidebooks, and few tourists stopped by on their way to Krakow or Warsaw.

But as the historian Joanna Michlic has shown, the fall of communism began a new era in Lodz's mottled history. In the 1990s Lodz began to excavate the shards of its Jewish and German past. One former mayor declared in 1996, as he was looking for ways to revive an industrial town down on its luck, that "local traditions are one of the best assets of the city. Present inhabitants of Lodz have inherited the memory of an urban center which developed in a rapid manner, was inclusive of people of different nationalities, and was open toward foreign capital...." The city's intellectuals began a serious attempt to re-conceive their city. In 1996 they started a new monthly, *Tygiel Kultury*, or *The Melting Pot of Culture*, aimed at exploring Lodz's multi-ethnic heritage. As Michlic points out, this journal became the "chief forum for debates about the city's identity," and it has spearheaded attempts to invite former German and Jewish inhabitants to commemorative events in Lodz. The municipal authorities have also begun to place cast-iron sculptures of famous Lodzhers along the city's showcase street, Piotrkowska. These include Artur Rubenstein, Julian Tuwim, Izrael Poznanski, and the German industrialists Karol Scheibler and Ludwik Grohman.

In 2001, Lodz inaugurated an annual "Festival of Dialogue between Four Cultures." Its organizers stressed that Lodz had once been a "multinational place of Poles, Jews, Russians, and Germans living, working, building their 'Promised Land' together." The Festival would reach back to the past to build a better future, a more tolerant Poland. With some exaggeration the Festival even described old Lodz as a model of toleration and mutual understanding. We learn even that

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"the United Europe towards which we are now making our way took its first steps in Lodz."

And so once again, memory returns—haltingly, tentatively, perhaps expediently. In August 2004, Lodz commemorated the sixtieth anniversary of the liquidation of the ghetto and invited former Jewish residents from Israel and other countries to participate. The old Lodzhers arrived and helped plant hundreds of trees in a memorial park. For a logo the city commemoration committee adopted a drawing from a notebook compiled in the Lodz ghetto by a Jewish boy named Abramek Koplowicz. Koplowicz died in the gas chambers of Auschwitz during the final deportation in the summer of 1944. He was fourteen. He left a poem that captured, in a way, the spirit of this remarkable city:

When I grow up and get to be twenty
I'll travel and see this world of plenty
I'm a bird with an engine
I will sit myself down.
Take off and fly into space, far above the ground.
I'll fly and cruise and soar up high,
Above a world so lovely into the sky.
And so delighted by all the world's charms,
Into the heavens I will take off and not have a bother.
The cloud is my sister, the wind is my brother. ◆

G.W. Bowersock
BURIED PLEASURE

THE FIRES OF VESUVIUS: POMPEII LOST AND FOUND
By Mary Beard
(Harvard University Press, 360 pp., $26.95)

FROM PARIS TO POMPEII: FRENCH ROMANTICISM AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF ARCHAEOLOGY
By Göran Blix
(University of Pennsylvania Press, 310 pp., $59.95)

POMPEII AND THE ROMAN VILLA: ART AND CULTURE AROUND THE BAY OF NAPLES
By Carol C. Mattusch
(Thames and Hudson: National Gallery of Art, 365 pp., $60)

In the year 79 C.E., Mount Vesuvius erupted, famously burying the ancient city of Pompeii under volcanic ash, where it lay unknown and undisturbed until the eighteenth century. But once the city was opened up to the light of day, first by accident and then by a frenzy of treasure-hunting, the horrifying drama of that apocalyptic event proved irresistible, even if some of the finds were judged disappointing. The terrible fate of the city's residents as they tried to escape, the beauty of the interior decoration of the more opulent houses, the temples and shrines, and the exhilarating obscenities that turned up frequently in both public and private places conspired to evoke a thriving pagan community. This was a community wiped out at the very moment that Christianity was beginning to make itself known in the Roman Empire. The city's apparently wanton lifestyle and the violence of its sudden end came to serve as a symbol of the inexorable rise of the new religion in the face of polytheism.

The last days of Pompeii provided the plot for operas by Pacini and Auber in the 1820s, to say nothing of challenges for stage designers with a penchant for spectacular pyrotechnics. A few years later, in 1834, Edward Bulwer-Lytton summoned up those last days for his lush Victorian novel, and with the advent of cinema the finale of Pompeii could appear before our very eyes. Thirty years ago, a blockbuster exhibition called *Pompeii A.D. 79* put all this modern enthusiasm into perspective by tapping into a rich vein of morbid curiosity tempered by human sympathy. Deploying a towering chart depicting layers of pumice, the show demonstrated the horror of being buried alive, and it placed the city's high life and villas alongside the crude realities of shops, brothels, and latrines. *Pompeii A.D. 79* revealed scholarship and sensationalism to be natural and congenial allies, as it moved grandly from one important venue to another—London, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, and New York. But it did not go to Washington, D.C.

Then the National Gallery put on its own Pompeii show in the nation's capital. This recent exhibition could hardly have been more different from the previous one. The title and subtitle of the Gallery's event, "Pompeii and the Roman Villa: Art and Culture Around the Bay of Naples," explicitly signaled the difference. This was less about Pompeii than it was about luxurious living, above all in the villas overlooking the Bay of Naples considerably to the north and west of Pompeii. The works of art collected there, and the ostentatious display of wealth, have almost completely wiped out the sordid but more human dimensions of Pompeii itself. A whole introductory chapter in the catalogue is devoted to luxury, with a quotation from Coco Chanel at the head of it: "Luxury is a necessity that begins where necessity ends." Another chapter is devoted to interior gardens, and yet another to art collections.

This exhibition was evidently conceived and planned for an economic environment altogether unlike the one in which it opened last fall. A grim irony overtook the sponsorship that the Bank of America provided for the show, and the high-toned prefatory statement from the bank's embattled CEO, Kenneth Lewis, must remind him now of a happier time. Of course his personal penchant for luxurious living seems to have been a cause of the crisis now facing his institution and others like it. Since the eighteenth century, Pompeii and the villas around the Bay of Naples have been a curiously reliable mirror of Western culture and taste, but this time it is a mirror of the culture and taste that have been cruelly battered since the last months of 2008. If the show at the National Gallery had opened a year earlier, its objects and images would have resonated with affluent collectors and connoisseurs everywhere. Its willful avoidance of the seamier side of Pompeian life would have found its analogue in a flourishing financial system that refused to recognize its own corruption. Now the fiery end of Pompeii may be the only thing to provoke a *frisson* among viewers.

The antiquity that we see is inevitably the antiquity that we construct out of what we have—the texts, monuments, and artifacts that have survived or been unearthed. Pompeii is important not because it really was all that important, but because we found it. Had we not, there is little in the ancient testimony that would have alerted us to what we were missing. The historian Tacitus reports that Pompeian sports fans engaged in a nasty brawl over a gladiatorial event

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with their neighbors in Nuceria, and the poet Martial briefly laments the sad fate of Pompeii in the eruption of Vesuvius. Pliny wrote two long letters to Tacitus to describe how his uncle, a polymath of the same name, died while making observations on the eruption, but Pliny did not even mention Pompeii. Without the modern exhumation of the city, Pompeii would mean no more to modern historians of Rome than Nuceria.

Yet we must be grateful. The discovery of the city opened up an unexpected and priceless amalgam of art, civic life, local religion, graffiti, and pornography in first-century Campania, the region at the foot of Vesuvius near the coast. It transformed the culture of Europe. It all began at Portici, a town north of Pompeii, where the Prince d'Elboeuf chose to build a country house in 1711. In the course of digging a well, his workmen unwittingly went straight through the lava flow that had buried the ancient city of Herculaneum at the same time as ash rained on Pompeii. A statue of Hercules, the city's eponymous hero, appeared along with statues of three women who were immediately identified for no good reason as Vestal Virgins. D'Elboeuf transferred the pieces to Vienna to relieve his financial difficulties. His treatment of Herculaneum as a source of useful treasure established the pattern for most of the work in the region throughout the rest of the century.

The Bourbon monarch Charles III (or, in Naples, Charles VII, as the National Gallery catalogue prefers to call him) had married Maria Amalia, who had seen the Vestal Virgins in Vienna. With her encouragement he decided to open further excavation at Herculaneum. This was not anything that could be reasonably described as an archaeological enterprise. It was deliberate plundering, with the recovery of precious objects its sole purpose. The ancient site was brutally disfigured by tunnels, even though D'Elboeuf's people had found nothing less than the city's theater. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, the great German historian of classical art, was appalled by what he saw, and in two open letters in 1762 and 1764 he vigorously denounced what was going on. Charles's first director, the Spaniard Roque Joaquín de Alcubierre, was, according to Winckelmann, "as unacquainted with antiques as the moon with crabs."

Alcubierre's assistant knew that the work was flawed, but he was unable to do much to stop it. The National Gallery catalogue hails this hapless person, a Swiss engineer named Karl Jakob Weber, as the person "to whom we can credit the birth of scientific archaeology." It is tempting to overestimate him because his drawing of the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum provided the architects of the Getty Museum in Malibu with the design for the villa to house the museum's classical collection. In the mid-1990s Weber was plucked from total obscurity when Christopher Parslow devoted an entire book to him. Despite appropriately Herculean efforts, Parslow seems not to have persuaded many people. Weber's name is completely absent from Göran Blix's fascinating new book on the impact of Herculaneum and Pompeii upon European views of antiquity, and it is equally absent from Mary Beard's lively and thorough account of life and culture in Pompeii's final years.

Dionysos with kantharos and maenad, 1st century C.E., Vesuvian region/Herculaneum

COURTESY NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

Blix rightly observes that eighteenth-century interest in the two doomed cities was all about buried treasure, and the wonderful subject that he has chosen for himself is the transformation of European interest in the cities throughout the nineteenth century. "The major shift I want to map here," he writes, "is the one from an image of Pompeii as a curious site of artistic treasures, prevalent in the eighteenth century, to the romantic myth of the city as a lost world magically restored by the powers of archaeology. Pompeii is transformed from a grave to be robbed into the image of a lost civilization." Both Pompeii and Herculaneum, which Blix does not neglect, served as a catalyst and a mirror of European taste.

The initial reaction to the emerging antiquities was by no means positive. The paintings that were gouged out of their walls in Herculaneum and installed in the Spanish king's private cabinet, the Museo Borbonico in Portici, failed to impress the abbé Barthélemy: "All the paintings from Herculaneum prove that those who made them were not great painters." The miraculous floating centaurs on a black background, which are part of the Washington exhibition, seemed to another critic no more than arabesques and lacking in verisimilitude, which is undoubtedly—and gloriously—true. As Blix observes, the art that came out of the Campanian ground ultimately altered the taste of the age: "The excavated frescoes and artifacts often served, when not dismissed, as an inspiration to neoclassical artists emerging from the rosy excesses of the rococo."

Blix's subject is so rich that it is a pity, though perfectly reasonable, that he chose to confine himself largely to French culture. But he manages to find a little space for Goethe, who commented on the elegant ornamentation of household utensils at Pompeii to rebut Diderot's dismissal of such humble objects as unworthy of serious attention. Yet neither man questioned that what really mattered was beauty. Although the buried cities provided an abundance of that, they provided so much more. It was the English antiquarians for whom the aesthetic criterion was much less important. The Society of Dilettanti found its ideal representative at Naples in the British envoy Sir William Hamilton, a collector whose rampant curiosity would have overwhelmed the capacity of any traditional European *Wunderkammer*. In 1787, Goethe visited Hamilton in Naples in his "secret den of art and junk."

As one of the first to take a serious interest in all the sexual objects at Pompeii, Hamilton believed that he had discovered a priapic cult still surviving not far away in Isernia. With his protégé Richard

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Payne Knight, he published in 1786 an extraordinary volume under the title *An Account of the Remains of the Worship of Priapus, Lately Existing at Isernia in the Kingdom of Naples*. The startling frontispiece depicts an artfully arranged pile of votive phalluses. Hamilton subsequently presented his miscellaneous collection of antiquities to the British Museum. In his desire to make the world of Pompeii known in all its diversity and ugliness, he provided the basis for a nineteenth-century re-appraisal of the Campanian cities not so much as a repository of beautiful objects but as living, pullulating communities that belonged to a lost era and supported a culture quite unlike Queen Victoria's.

It is the long vanished life of Pompeii that Mary Beard evokes in all its detail and complexity in her new book. There is a whiff of Compton Mackenzie in her title, but then anything connected with society on the Bay of Naples, in antiquity or today, will not be far removed from the louche world of Capri in *Vestal Fire*. It is hard to believe that the world that Beard conjures up is the same one that the National Gallery put on display, because the exhibition sanitized the story beyond recognition. By a strange irony, which demonstrates the mysterious power of Campania to continue to mirror modern tastes, the Gallery turned all the way back to the collecting mentality of the eighteenth century, and it explicitly concentrated on the affluent residents along the bay as collectors. Beard herself has toed the line in this enterprise by contributing an essay on "Art Collections in the Bay of Naples." But in her book she gives us Pompeii itself, with its smells and swill, its sex and superstition, its poverty and pathos. It is a wholly successful evocation, pieced together from a deep knowledge of a frighteningly large bibliography.

Only recently has everything we can know, or want to know, about Pompeii been assembled in seven hundred pages, with accompanying CD and website by J. J. Dobbins and P. W. Foss. Their compendium, called *The World of Pompeii*, appeared in 2007 and aimed to replace the comprehensive work by August Mau, *Pompeii: Its Life and Art*, from the end of the nineteenth century. The website for the new book even reproduces a complete text of Mau in the second edition that appeared in 1907. Yet even with this superabundance of information, Carol Mattusch, the curator of the show at the National Gallery, complained in a recent review that the book concentrates too much on Pompeii and its buildings and attends too little to the villa culture around the Bay of Naples. Her complaint illustrates the ambivalence in the National Gallery's Pompeii exhibition. It was substantially devoted to other places than Pompeii and almost exclusively concerned with beautiful works of art. The name of Pompeii is marketable, but the names of Oplontis, Herculaneum, and Puteoli—all exceptionally interesting—are not.

In 1970, the late and much-missed John D'Arms, who led the American Academy in Rome and afterwards the American Council of Learned Societies, published a thorough study of the good life around the Bay of Naples. Italian colleagues so much admired *Romans on the Bay of Naples* that they reprinted the book after his death along with a valuable selection of his articles on related subjects. D'Arms's work is a historical pendant to the artistic analysis in Mattusch's catalogue, whereas Mary Beard addresses the life, the artifacts, and the terrible fate of Pompeii almost exclusively. The Harvard University Press has given her excellent color plates as well as many black-and-white illustrations. Through her coruscating prose and well-chosen images Pompeii comes alive for the contemporary reader. The combination of squalor and splendor, with ubiquitous public obscenities and highly personal revelations in graffiti on its walls, bespeaks a world very different from the Washington exhibition. One graffito consists of botched elegiacs that appear to be a rare instance of lesbian love poetry.

The glamorous world of the villas on the Bay of Naples had its roots in quotidian activities of every kind. At Pompeii, for example, the house of a certain Lucius Caecilius Jucundus revealed 153 documents that had been originally scratched in wax over a wooden tablet. The stylus left its impression on the wood beneath, and although the wax has now gone the words are still there. Jucundus turned out to have been a busy financier, well characterized by Beard as a combination of "auctioneer, middleman, and moneylender." He not only made decent profits in his lifetime, he also enabled us today to write about Pompeii's economy and the four hundred or so people, including women, who did business with him.

The interest of the eighteenth century in curiosities and fine art had been joined with a proto-anthropological taste for odd customs, particularly for such antiquarians as Hamilton and Knight. Charles III (or VII), who did so much both to expose and to damage Herculaneum, created a Herculaneum Academy that devoted itself to a lavish publication of the finds, and the French edition of this work that began to appear in 1781 found a very receptive audience as France clawed its way out of the *ancien régime*. Anyone who dines at Le Grand Véfour in Paris can still see on its walls the Campanian legacy to French culture. But if the serried ranks of volumes of *Antiquities of Herculaneum* were, as Blix realizes, an essential source for the romanticism of the nineteenth century, the real antiquities on the ground had to wait for the serious archaeology that Giuseppe Fiorelli undertook at Pompeii in the second half of the century. It was he who had the inspired idea of putting plaster into the cavities left by the decay of the corpses of those who died in the eruption. The casts of the victims, both human and animal, caught in the moment of death have made their tragic fate uncommonly vivid after almost two thousand years.

Without Fiorelli, the comprehensive survey of August Mau would not have been possible. Much of what Mary Beard describes in her book was known in the twentieth century, but the more scabrous and indelicate items were kept secluded in cabinets for much of the century, and were accessible only to those with authorization or bribes. In our present liberated age, everything can be told and seen. Beard gives a full-page image of the unparalleled painting of the fertility god Priapus weighing his immense distended penis in one pan of a scale that is evenly balanced on the other side by a large money-bag. This picture is emblematic of the issues raised by the National Gallery's exhibition, not least because it does not appear there. The ageless competition between wealth and sex has never been more strikingly displayed than in this image. It was a competition that mattered greatly along the Bay of Naples.

Beard would like her book to be a helpful guide to visitors to Pompeii, and to that end she provides useful and up-to-date tips—where lavatories, restaurants, and bars can be found, and why one should not get too hot by wasting a lot of time in the Forum. She goes on to observe correctly that "the site administration is under-funded, and this means that some of the buildings you will want to see will be locked." This warning points to a perennial problem with the site, as well as to an issue currently raging in Italy over the proper management of its cultural heritage. Some Italian scholars have recently proposed a privatization of the state's cultural property on the model of American museums, and, in the case of the parlous condition of Herculaneum,

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the Packard Humanities Institute has already come to the rescue with a large long-term grant. In his contribution to the National Gallery catalogue, Pietro Giovanni Guzzo, the special *soprintendente* for the archaeological remains of Naples and Pompeii, makes appropriate acknowledgment of this grant.

The cooperation of the Italian authorities in preserving and presenting the treasures in their care is naturally an indispensable part of current research on Pompeii and the Campanian villas. Both the Washington exhibition and the book by Mary Beard would be inconceivable without such cooperation, and it is heartening to find that not only Guzzo but also Stefano De Caro, General Director for Italy's archaeological heritage, have contributed to the National Gallery's catalogue. We have come a long way from the archaeological exploitation of the eighteenth century. The objects and the buildings that came to light then have not changed, but what happened to them in the two succeeding centuries tells us at least as much about modernity as it does about antiquity. ◆

Peter N. Miller
THE HUMAN FACTOR

EUROPE BETWEEN THE OCEANS: 9000 BC TO AD 1000.
By Barry Cunliffe
(Yale University Press, 480 pp., $39.95)

PLAYMOBIL, the German company that specializes in detailed snap-together plastic toys, makes a Viking ship. Seventeen inches long and five wide, with six sweep oars, a steering oar, and a single movable square sail, the toy precisely models surviving Viking ships in museums in Roskilde, Denmark and Oslo, Norway. It also floats in bathtubs. Most of its users will not realize, of course, that the Viking ship was the plank-built descendant of the much older hide-covered ships that had sailed the northern seas for well over a thousand years before the Vikings, or that the Vikings themselves were but the last of a long sequence of ocean-going migrants.

Perspective is something that readers of Barry Cunliffe have come to expect. In *Facing the Ocean: The Atlantic and its Peoples*, which appeared in 2001, and now in its sequel, he has chosen to study Europe's oceanic destiny. Europe was, and is, the land between the oceans. Its deeply convoluted coasts and island fragments make for a total of 37,000 kilometers of interface between land and sea—equivalent to the world's circumference. It was "no accident" that Europe's first civilization arose in the Aegean Sea (on Crete), where the ratio of coast to land was at its greatest. The seashore is also where Europe came from—whence Europa was kidnapped to Crete, "a reminder, if one were needed," Cunliffe notes with characteristic charm, "that the seashore is a liminal place where unexpected things can happen!"

Observations of this sort occur on nearly every page of this captivating book. Cunliffe makes the best possible case for archaeology as a specifically human science: not the study of mute objects, but of the walking, thinking, feeling human beings who made or transformed those objects. *Europe Between the Oceans* is a work of great humanity, looking back across the abyss of time to catch a dim echo of our earlier selves. What is reconstructed is the early history of Europe, from the end of the last glaciation to the emergence of the continent's first nations. What is re-interpreted is something closer to human nature itself. Archaeology, at this vanishing point, blends back into anthropology, from which it separated either a hundred, two hundred, or three hundred years ago, depending on whom you ask. And Cunliffe, himself, takes on the role of sage, like those early anthropologists whose vocation was a way of glimpsing the eternal while talking about the particular. (Both Durkheim and Lévi-Strauss were descendants of rabbis.)

The great advantage of deep distance in time (archaeology) or space (anthropology) is that the significant comes into focus and the trivial blurs to insignificance. For humans, the most important thing is food. And so, romantic encounters at the tideline aside, riverbanks, deltas, and sea coasts were important, because they offered a fantastically rich and regular caloric harvest—a side benefit of which was the presence of iodine, which boosted fertility.

Coastal middens, or garbage dumps, often of gigantic proportions, still amaze with the power of the sea's nutritional wealth. At a couple of sites in modern-day Denmark, we find middens over 6.5 feet tall, 800 feet long, and 160 feet wide. These testify to substantial settlements in use for a very long time—radiocarbon suggests that these sites were in continuous use for eight hundred to one thousand years. Imagine a city twice as old as New York but surviving in later memory only through its Fresh Kills. (Imagine, too, how terribly fragile and limited that memory would be: such is our relationship to this distant world.) And yet there is a reason why there are so many shells here: calorically speaking, "a single red deer would be worth fifty thousand oysters."

The littoral, therefore, offered a regular and plentiful but rather desperate situation: without constant effort and searching, these established old societies would not have survived, let alone grown. It is the interplay between biology and psychology that Cunliffe keeps revealing for us. In all animal populations, there is a particular "holding capacity" of the land: exceed its caloric resources and the population faces decimation. Still—and this is part of what makes Cunliffe's presentation so powerful—he does not see this as an argument for nutritional determinism. "Holding capacity" can be altered by climate or technology or behavior modification, external (such as war or plague) or internal (marriage rules, sexual behavior, culling through ritual murder). Cunliffe never forgets to remind us that humans are crucially dependent on their environment, but he also never fails to recall that humans have "always had an effect on their environment, often initiating long-term change." If there is a subtext to his grand narrative, it is that humans make their history.

A HISTORY OF some of the most innovative historiography of the twentieth century could be charted through writings about the Mediterranean, from Weber to Pirenne to Braudel to Goitein to the great historians on either side of our own Atlantic, Chris Wickham at Oxford and Michael McCormick at Harvard. These scholars revolutionized the use of material evidence by historians. At the heart of their work is the challenge of reconciling the human and the structural, the personal and the impersonal dimensions of past time: how to be true to the individual nature of experience without missing the big patterns that are only visible from a more godlike remove.

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As unlikely as it might seem, it may be the archaeologist Cunliffe who shows us what the solution to this sphinx-like riddle might be. And he does so partly by shifting the historian's field of vision from a Mediterranean Europe to an Atlantic Europe. For the Church Fathers, as for Hesiod, light may have come from the East, but for our ancestors food came from the West and the North. The Mediterranean of philologists and package tours is in fact a resource-poor environment. As the last ice sheet receded, Cunliffe observes, "the hitherto inhospitable north—the shores of the Baltic and the North Sea—became congenial, welcoming environments for the hunter-gatherers now colonizing the more northerly parts of the continent, while to the south, in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, the productive coastal environments became successively more restricted with rapidly rising sea levels."

Indeed, if one were to follow upstream to their watersheds the great rivers that perforate Europe's maritime façades, one would find that the Atlantic rivers extend deep inland, bringing with them resources and access to even greater resources. The Mediterranean and Black Sea system, by contrast, is shallow and hemmed in by high mountain barriers. "Atlantic world" studies are now all the rage in university history and literature departments; and reading Cunliffe one wonders if the Atlantic will be the Mediterranean of the twenty-first century.

Cunliffe views Europe's ecological diversity—the unequal distribution of natural resources—as what Braudel called "imbalances productive of change." The human response is measured in terms of mobility and sociability. Nature may propose, but it is the humans, in Cunliffe's view, who do the disposing. Cunliffe admires Braudel and sympathetically evokes his notion of the *longue durée*, or long time span, as crucial for understanding the past. And yet Cunliffe balks at the idea of human history without a human face. In a book devoted to ten thousand years of human history, nearly all recovered from material remains, Cunliffe brings us face to face, again and again, with individuals who etch themselves into memory.

Here we meet such people as Sostratos son of Laodamas, mentioned by Herodotus as a rich exporter of Attic black-figured pottery to the Etruscan heartland, where many pieces have been found 2,500 years later inscribed with a mark that begins "SO …," along with a dedicatory inscription reading "I am of Aeginetan Apollo: Sostratos had me made. …" Or Hanno the Carthaginian, who sailed down the west coast of Africa in the third century B.C.E. and upon his return set up an inscription in the Temple of Baal giving the details of his trip. The inscription no longer survives, but a copy was made in the tenth century C.E., and the details are there. What began as a colonial reconnaissance mission turned into a voyage of discovery that took him to Sierra Leone and possibly Cameroon. (The discovery in 1749 of eight Carthaginian coins of the third century B.C.E. in the Azores suggests that this was not impossible.)

And what of Ingvar? He left central Sweden with a small fleet of ships in 1036 C.E. on a five-year trip via the Gulf of Finland and Novgorod to the Dnepr River, Black Sea and Byzantium, and then via Tbilisi to the Caspian Sea and eastward into Asia where, according to Icelandic sagas, he and his men met disaster. Thirty memorial stones were put up by grieving relatives, who included his brother Harald. There were so many Ingvars and Haralds plying those long rivers of western Eurasia that the Swedish name by which these traders were called, "Rus" or "Rhos," was eventually given to the land itself. And finally there is Cunliffe's own hero, the great scholar and explorer Pytheas of Massalia (the ancient Marseille), who visited Brittany, England, and probably Iceland around 350 B.C.E. and then wrote a book about it, fragments of which survive, mangled, in the works of others.

And where we do not have a name, Cunliffe tries to imagine himself back into the mind of the person. A Bronze Age burial on the south coast of Sweden, dated 1700–1500 B.C.E., contains images of horses, a figure riding a two-wheeled chariot pulled by a pair of horses, long boats, two axes, a monolith, and a parade of human figures, all but the last clearly from beyond the Nordic realm. Cunliffe suggests that the lord of Kivik (that is the name of the site) could well have led his warriors from home via the island of Bornholm to the mouth of the Oder and thence to the Carpathian basin, where chariots with spoked wheels were then found—and found only then and only there. The burial chamber contained scenes from this adventure story. "Fantasy perhaps," Cunliffe observes, "but that voyages of exploration were made at this time is not in doubt. The Kivik lord may have been one of many such explorers."

And where we do not have even a person, but only objects and things, Cunliffe is able to show us how the survival of material culture implies a narrative of human lives. Perforated amber spacer plates in necklaces have been found in Bronze Age Wessex, in southern Britain, where they seem to have been manufactured—there, and also in Mycenae. How is this possible, we might ask. Cunliffe asks, more incisively, whether this was a one-off, or the unique survival of a larger trade pattern. Did the object travel overland across Europe, or by sea through the Atlantic and Pillars of Hercules? And, if the latter, did it makes its journey in one stage or through coastal tramping? Was it carried by a merchant, or, perhaps by a woman sent as a gift to a Mycenaean prince? The imagination kindles strongly

Dreams of Permanence

How many times have I driven past
and not noticed the beauty of the abandoned
truck, its black-tinted windows safeguarding
a homeless man's makeshift bed, or taken in
that war of names, the faint, illegible,
legible scribblings dashed off in weak light
of a nearby lamppost just before city cops,
seemingly patrolling only this part of town,
rush to manhandle some shy kid who longs
merely for the miraculous,—a recognition unfound
among his six younger siblings whose sprawling
caretaking fades him to a name among names
when needed & called in their cramped
walk-up apartment? Here, in the open
gallery a lot makes, a canvas for the poor,
this non-erasable truck, a quick aerosol emboss
where he swiftly tattoos and revives each letter
in a made-up name like gold till it glitters even
in darkness on a city with its spilled
tires, crumbling facades, and sidewalk blossoming
weeds detonating dreams of permanence.
No wonder then, each would-be immortal hasn't
climbed the truck's roof and tagged the upper reaches,
having to scurry their scrawlings fast enough to sign
evidence of having been here: DONDI, SAMO,
LEE, or OZ, then a make on the run.

MAJOR JACKSON

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to the perspectives opened up by such questions.

So it is not only a matter of re-defining space to include the Atlantic, or re-defining time to include pre-history. (Cunliffe forcefully brandishes Lucien Febvre's dismissal of the category of pre-history: "in this book, we are all historians.") If Cunliffe manages to resolve the tension present in all those wonderful twentieth-century Mediterranean histories and create a real cultural history of the material world, it is because, despite working with a body of evidence that is fundamentally faceless, he insists on the centrality of the human experience, and finds it. His book is a reminder that historians, too, are not determined by their climate or geography, but are products of a much more inscrutable dialectic.

With Cunliffe the archaeologist-as-cultural historian as our guide, we may revisit also an earlier age's attempt to understand the origins of European civilization: the late Renaissance and Enlightenment thought experiment of "conjectural history." When Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and others painted the picture of a "state of nature" from which they extrapolated a whole series of conclusions about human nature and political society, they were actually speculating about what we now know as the Mesolithic (from around 9000 B.C.E.) and Neolithic (in Europe, from around 5000 B.C.E.) ages. Those gigantic shell middens of the Mesolithic coastal foragers, or the settlement at Çatalhöyük in central Anatolia, which extended over thirty-two acres with many closely packed rectangular houses, or the tel at Karanovo in Northern Bulgaria, whose forty feet of height and twenty-five acres of circumference enclose two thousand years of occupation—all these places do indeed suggest the primal reality of coercive power.

In the Mesolithic period, with the onset of neo-thermal conditions in Europe, we first find sedentary communities storing their own food. In the beginning, Cunliffe suggests, it is likely food that was the key token of power. Those with access to, or control of, greater caloric resources were the most powerful. In turn, they developed symbolic structures to enhance this hierarchy. It is then that we begin to find complex behavior patterns that strengthen social inequalities, such as grave goods marking social differentiation. Since status tokens in children's graves could not have been earned, they suggest the existence, already, of inheritance patterns.

Not surprisingly, this was also an age of "Hobbesian" aggression: 44 percent of burials from Mesolithic Denmark show evidence of traumatic blows to the skull. In Sweden and France, it is 20 percent. In Bavaria in 1908, two groups of skulls were found in pits. Men, women, and children had been bludgeoned, and then their heads cut off. This occurred some time around 6400 B.C.E. And yet at this same time, at Lepenski Vir on the Danube, circa 6500 B.C.E., we find a permanent settlement with well-built houses featuring compacted floors edged with stone, hearths, and timber roofs. Houses have paths between them leading to a central open space fronting the river. "The implication is of an imposed social order maintained over generations as the houses were successively rebuilt." There is organization here, and organization implies authority. Was it in places like this that the "social contract" was devised? Can we see through the archaeologist's distant mirror to the beginning of politics as we know it?

But it is surely even more the case that the shift from Mesolithic foragers (or hunter-gatherers, as we use to call them) to Neolithic food producers created the necessary conditions of political power. We find, interestingly, a fairly tight connection between the presence of the full Neolithic package in Brittany (domestication of grains and livestock, permanent dwellings, ceramics and metallurgy) and the appearance of menhirs, or megaliths (around 4700 B.C.E.). The largest of them is 348 tons and would have been sixty-six feet high. It was dragged two-and-a-half miles. Excavation shows that the Grand Menhir was probably the terminal of eighteen of these things in increasing size. If all had been erected, the labor cost would have been huge. Like the pyramids of Egypt but two thousand years earlier, this is evidence for "coercive leadership on an unprecedented scale."

Along with the beginnings of politics—maybe even social thought?—in the Menhirs we may be witnessing also the beginnings of organized religion. Like Stonehenge across the water, these represent some attempt to make a cosmological statement. In late Bronze Age Scandinavia, we find a shift from inhumation to cremation, from chthonic deities to the sky god. The role of the sky was—perhaps, but Cunliffe is bold—emphasized by the use of the "sunship bird" motif: a solar disc carried on a boat whose prow and stern were swans. This is found on repoussé bronzework and on bronze knives and razors. And the shift from collective to single burial must say something about the meaning of the individual.

With the Neolithic package, then, we are in a world which we may still unironically call the Old Regime. In his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Rousseau tried to explain the beginnings of agriculture, property and metallurgy, drawing on the best ethnographic writing of his day. In *Europe Between the Oceans*, Cunliffe shows us how archaeology can strip away much of the "conjecture" from conjectural history. Someone trying to tell Rousseau's story today would need to read this book.

The history of technology may be the ultimate demonstration of what the Romans meant by *cultura*, or the human transformation of the natural world. In the Neolithic we find both matter and space being transformed. Copper and gold were mined, our earliest evidence for this coming from the northwest of Bulgaria around 5100 B.C.E. Tin came from Cornwall. A commercial revolution brought them together, and a technological revolution made them one: thus was born the Bronze Age.

Ceramics, another means of taming fire and turning earth into truth and beauty, provides us not only with material culture, but also a window into the soul. "For many," Cunliffe remarks, "the plasticity of unfired clay provided a freedom for expressing identity by favouring particular shapes and kinds of decoration." Looking at some of the first European-made ceramics, he remarks that "Europe's early potters were brilliantly inventive. Their sense of form, space and colour was often stunning, and in sheer creativity they could hold their own with the best of modern craft potters."

The domestication of the horse and the development of wheeled transport helped to diffuse these inventions. We have no evidence for ships before 2600 B.C.E., but their perfected appearance at that point suggests that boat building must already have had a long history. The sail seems to have been introduced from Egypt sometime around 2000 B.C.E. But where we find things, there must also be thoughts. Cunliffe connects the dots in the Neolithic period: "Knowledge, particularly knowledge of distant places and people, became a desirable attribute for those who aspired to power." This was the world described in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The cultural prominence of those epics must reflect on some level a respect for those who voyaged into the distant unknown. "Encounters of this kind," Cunliffe observes, "pervading all corners

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of the European peninsula, brought people into contact and through such contact knowledge and ideas would have flowed.... In Europe distances are not great and knowledge could spread rapidly. The networks of communication pulsated with the flow of information—stories of exotic lands and people, technological know-how, systems of values and beliefs." These are Cunliffe's main themes, and they make his book a model for all those interested in thinking about things.

Fascinatingly, Cunliffe frequently resorts to the image of pioneering to explain the spread of the Neolithic package across Europe: "there is no reason to suppose that the 'pioneer spirit' is a characteristic only of recent societies." As if mapping a pre-historic manifest destiny, he calculates that if a generation was twenty years, it would need a new settlement to be established at an average distance of only sixty kilometers—a three days' walk—from the previous generation's home for a culture to spread across 1,500 kilometers in five hundred years—as it did in Europe across the Hungarian Plain from 6500 B.C.E., eventually reaching the shores of the Atlantic by around 5000 B.C.E.

And where does this "pioneering spirit," or "pioneering ethic," come from? More than the spirit of adventure, Cunliffe wants us to see in our distant ancestors a curiosity that is our own inheritance. "All human beings want to know," Aristotle wrote. This is what spurred on those voyagers to the west. The hordes sprung ever anew from Central Asia and poured into Europe, perching on its Atlantic rim and staring out at the setting sun—before, eventually, building boats and following that sun to a new world.

Cunliffe asks us to imagine that when King Menelaus of Mycenae boasted in the *Odyssey* of his travels to Cyprus, Phoenicia, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Libya, he and his contemporaries might have been "driven by a curiosity to know what lay beyond." Thousands of years, but really no time at all, separates the Bronze Age Odysseus from the Renaissance Ulysses, who urged his crewmen into the uncharted Ocean beyond the Straits of Gibraltar with the words: "You were not made to live as brutes, but to pursue knowledge and virtue." Even less separates Dante's imagined hell from Primo Levi's real one, where his own urgent lunchtime lesson on Ulysses's speech hit him "like the blast of a trumpet, like the voice of God."

Cunliffe dares us to try and understand the people whose traces we encounter on the strand of time. He talks about their "psychological needs," and in doing so he testifies to our own. An academic generation ago, this might have been unseemly; and certainly Braudel, Cunliffe's hero, would never have stooped so low. Humans were not so interesting to him; he famously described their lives—our lives—as froth on the waves. And even though Cunliffe refers to this passage, he deftly slips its misguided punch. As in Goitein and McCormick, Cunliffe's world is a mosaic of faces in motion. And as in Weber and Wickham, movement is a mark of power, and power is something to be studied.

The elite in Bronze Age societies were elite because they were able to siphon off the wealth moving across their lands. Anyone in New York City this winter was able to walk into the reconstructed hull of a 3,400-year-old wreck in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and see for themselves just what this amounted to: 354 oxhide ingots of copper weighing ten tons, 120 bun-shaped copper ingots, pithoi packed with Cypriot pottery, and Canaanite amphorae with a ton of terebinth resin. Around this bulk cargo were ingots of tin weighting a ton, colored raw glass, scrap gold and silver, an elephant tusk cut into shells, two hippopotamus teeth, logs of Egyptian ebony, and ostrich shells. Additional items which may have belonged to the crew include two swords, one Syrian and one Mycenaean, Syrian pendants, a Mesopotamian cylinder seal, an Egyptian scarab, various Mycenaean pots, and a writing tablet.

Since natural constraints limited production, any surplus to be distributed in exchange for allegiance had to come from somewhere else. Disruption at any point in the system linking transport, trade, communications, and distribution strained agricultural productivity, leading to harsh extraction measures. These, in turn, drove agricultural populations away, leaving sophisticated palace cultures to collapse under the weight of their own needs. The fall of civilizations in Crete and Egypt c. 1300 B.C.E. under the onslaught of the Sea Peoples shows highly diversified societies falling apart when these connecting links were removed. In the same way, the Celtic migrations and the Scythian irruption one thousand or so years later shattered the trans-peninsular routes that created the wealthy Halstatt culture of the fifth century B.C.E., creating a new locus of power around previous fringe groups (so-called "La Tène" culture) who now controlled "the throughput of commodities."

As monumental as the Neolithic Revolution was, it left intact a major feature of social life. And as brilliant as was the conjecture of the eighteenth century's conjectural historians to set their prehistory of property to the rhythm of its spread, they missed something crucial about the performance of property. We have had to wait for twentieth-century anthropologists, for Marcel Mauss and his heirs, to see that in truly pre-modern societies relations between unequals were driven by the dynamics of gift exchange. Cunliffe, the archaeologist, here points us to where we find a final shift from gift-giving as an exchange of protection for obligation to exchange as a way of mediating more complex relationships between degrees of power and degrees of obligation: in the Nordic lands circa 200 B.C.E., and in the La Tène culture of Southern Germany even more recently. In the former, it was due to the severing of trading connections caused by hostile migrations; in the latter to access to goods coming across the Alps from the Mediterranean zone. These late adaptations remind us how very young Europe is as a culture, and how very revolutionary compared to other cultures, where gift exchange remains dominant almost to this day—and also how this unique product was created by an alchemy of North-South relations absolutely invisible from a Med-centric perspective.

In the end, of course, there is Rome, which is the destination of Cunliffe's analysis. Seen through the archaeologist's long lens, the problem for Rome was no different than that of all earlier societies, whatever their sophistication: how to expand the fixed holding capacity of land. With elites always grabbing more because they could do so (and this, functionally speaking, is still what defines elite status) land reform was one option (the Gracchi and Marius in the first century B.C.E.), and conquest, colonization, and the venting of excess population the other (Pompey, Caesar, Tiberius, and so on).

But on Cunliffe's reading, there was no golden age, no Antonine apogee from which to decline. The problem of holding capacity was always there, and the problem of marauding migrants was always there, too. The Republic was ravaged by the Celts in the third century B.C.E., and by the Germans in the first. Hadrian tried to secure the Empire's frontiers by conquest in the second century C.E., but he failed, leaving passive defense along the border the only option. Which is to say: waiting for the next wave of migrants to return. His grandson, Marcus Aurelius, sitting on that cold frontier with his troops waiting for the barbarians, knew that even the might of Rome

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could offer but a slight interruption to nature's course. He reflected that "time is like a river made up of events, and the current is strong; no sooner does anything appear than it is swept away, and another comes in its place, and will be swept away too."

It appears, then, that what the classicist and the classicizer alike might regard as the end of antiquity was but the return to a longer-term European equilibrium. This is quite a correction of perspective. The end of the Roman political regime in the midde of the first millenium marks the reversion to a world dominated by movement, and movement on the grand scale: long-haul routes across Eurasia, not mere Mediterranean puddle-jumping.

And this is still our world. Cunliffe points to the Vikings and their role in funding the migrant-kingdoms-coalesced-into-states of northern Europe—exactly where Pirenne started, nearly a century ago. But movement across Eurasia, and across the oceans, remains our reality. Karl Schlögel, the great German historian and political anthropologist, recently published a powerful book entitled *Planet of Nomads*. For him, the twentieth century C.E. represents both a continuation and an acceleration of vast movements of populations, owing to war, expulsion, immigration, or economics. For the single year 1993, the United Nations estimated that there were 100 million people on the move. Why are the millions of Europeans, Asians, Americans, and Africans who uprooted themselves over the past hundred years in search of a better life any different from the hordes who march across the pages of Cunliffe's book? There are all sorts of implications to be contemplated. Perhaps "migration art," for instance, ought not be limited to early medieval belt buckles and brooches, but could include the work of Nigerians in London or Kwakwaka'waka in Chicago. From our perch at the end of time, it is the nineteenth-century world of secure borders and fixed social orders that most resembles, like Marcus Aurelius's Roman Empire, an elaborate sandcastle on the beach as the tide again comes in. And the tide is always coming in. ◆

Sophia Lear
TUNNEL VISION

LOWBOY
By John Wray
(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 258 pp., $25)

Craigslist has a section called "Missed Connections," with posts about exactly that. The settings vary. Connections are missed in line at the drugstore or the bank or the movie theater, in the street, on the bus and the train, at concerts, airports, sporting events, at bars and coffee shops. And a steady undercurrent of these frustrations occurs in the subway. Whatever the specifics—Red Line, 4:30 p.m., *that smile*—the posts sing together one unsullied message to their objects of desire: you might have passed by unnoticed in the background of my experience, but no—you *were* the experience, you were the spotlighted star. There is romance nestled in such a declaration, a cool sentimentality that depends on the dense texture of urban life, the phenomenon of strangers, the habituation to a living background that hums and bustles with us or without us, and is full of wounds and wants that we all agree to ignore just to get by.

The line between the individual and his surroundings vanishes in the city, which is a kind of sea: separating the figure from the ground, the person from the blur, demands a conscious effort, an exercise in mental editing, on the part of its fast-moving dwellers. Cities transmute the distinction between background and foreground from a presumption into an activity. And it was in the subway, that hurling sardine box of perfect strangers, that this aspect of urban life coalesced, became visible. In 1938, for example, Walker Evans descended into the tunnels and began to document it. With a small lens peeking out between the buttons of his coat, Evans rode the New York subway and photographed the unsuspecting passengers sitting across from him. Published in 1966 as *Many Are Called*, the images are indelible. His subjects—gossiping women, hard and suspicious men, sophisticated ladies, wizened gentlemen—are not exactly ignoring Evans and the other denizens of the car; they are, subtly but undeniably, masking themselves. "Before every mirror [the mask] is hard at work, saving the creature who cringes behind it from the sight that might destroy it," James Agee insisted in his introduction to the collection.

The best way to describe Will Heller, or Lowboy, the star of John Wray's novel, is that he is the cringing creature without a mask. A sixteen-year-old paranoid schizophrenic with an affinity for the New York subway, Will's posturing always misses the mark. In a photograph Will appears panicked, a "grin … fixed to the front of [his face] like a screen around an operating table." Will cannot for the life of him keep background and foreground straight. This is a crisis of the assigning of meaning with ease. In some moments Will drowns in the sheer amount of data at hand, and in others all significance evaporates and the subway and the people in it are no more than a stage set: "The walls of the car, for example, that had always seemed so solid, were actually hollow as an egg.… Unreality broke over him again, stronger and more emphatic than before. It's a wave, that's all, he told himself. A wave like any other. You can ride it like a surfer if you want to."

Bellow's dangling man would recognize an unhinged cousin in Will Heller. Bellow's Joseph observes that "there was no trusting [the objects of common sense], save through wide agreement, and that my separation from such agreement had brought me perilously far from that necessary trust, auxiliary to all sanity." If Joseph can imagine living outside this agreement, Will lives in permanent exile from it. In *Lowboy*, he is in exile from the cognitive consensus, a mad savant, seeing the world with a sloughed-off rawness that his fellow passengers, gliding through their nine-to-five slog, register only as a vague exhaustion: "The train pulled into the next station and the car began to fill with clayfaced people. That's the tiredness, thought Lowboy. They want to curl up on the ground and go to sleep."

John Wray's first novel, *The Right Hand of Sleep*, set in rural Austria on the cusp of World War II, appeared to great acclaim in 2001, when Wray was twenty-nine. *Canaan's Tongue*, his Civil War-era second novel, published in 2005, was similarly well received, and cemented Wray's membership in the cadre of critically praised but somehow underappreciated young writers. (A group that apparently gathers for consoling dinner parties, according to *New York* magazine.) So what, exactly, are most of us missing out on?

Novels that attract critical acclaim tend to have one of two traits: either vast investments of the writer's own intellect (as in *Infinite Jest*), so that they provide some plausible view of The Way We Live Now; or a supreme self-conscious-

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ness about constructing a narrative (as in *White Teeth*), so that they provoke an aesthetic satisfaction on the part of readers and critics ("so that's how it works!"). Wray offers neither. His three novels are told straight, with no analytical or authorial voice in sight. What Wray does offer is an extended portrait of the interiority of troubled men. For Wray, a type of madness lies at the heart of seeing the world clearly, and that is his subject. It is odd: as historical atrocities (the Holocaust, slavery) rumble in the background of his first two novels, Wray telescopes his lens on one individual troubled not by the events of history, but by an attunement to a certain horror of living that courses beneath all circumstance. "The lights get brighter suddenly as in a theater & I'm in the audience & not even in a good seat," Will writes to his mother during a sojourn in an asylum. "I've seen terrible things Violet. Somebody had to see them. Somebody low." Wray's uncannily observant protagonist may be crazy; but to have no inkling of this perspective, for Wray, is the real insanity.

The madness that discreetly haunted Will Heller's protagonist predecessors—Oskar Voxlauer, in *The Right Hand of Sleep*, fears inheriting the insanity that led his father to suicide; in *Canaan's Tongue*, Virgil Ball, blind in one eye, has visions swirling with shapes and portents—explodes in *Lowboy*. Surroundings matter. Voxlauer, in the mode of Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River," finds solace in the modesty and the process of natural order. But for Will there is only New York City and the brutal subway beneath it. With the pendulum swung to one extreme, Will looks at the subway car and sees too much:

> a controlled environment, a staging area, planned down to the last detail by people he would never know or see. No surprises in here, Lowboy said to himself. No accidents.... He would never meet the people who'd drawn the blueprint, never have a chance to question them, but he could learn things just by looking at the car. You could see, for example, that they were fearful men.... The interior of the car was waterproof, the better to be hosed down in case of bloodshed. And the seats were arranged not for maximum efficiency, not to seat the greatest number of people comfortably and safely, but to express the designers' fear with perfect clarity: Nobody sat with their back turned on anybody else.

In Wray's netherworld, the city—and the incessant contemplation of the unnatural and the man-made that it provokes—aggravates and abrades a bad mind. (Will imagines the subway as an ouroboros, "the dragon that ate its own tail.") And the usurpation of nature by the city changes everything: nature is alive and poetically inscrutable, a replenishing source of expansive wonder, whereas the urban universe is dead and packed with all too legible significations. For Wray, there is madness in never escaping these significations and their specificities.

Wray wants Lowboy to be a grandly relevant everyman—a clunky plot twist in the last pages reveals that even those who appear normal can be as mad as he is—and Wray does succeed in rendering Will vividly recognizable, with language that is modest, familiar, and yet disorienting. (Wray began as a poet.) But unfortunately, all this—the language, the humane sympathy, the devotion to truth—does not lift *Lowboy* very far above its unbelievably circumscribed subject. Wray places all his chips on his central character (the few other characters are flat, and utterly unavailable to us), and the bet does not quite pay off. Finally Will is too stunted to say much about living (a requirement of a novel, no?).

One could imagine a novel that captured the perspective of a baby or a dog in a way that seemed truthful and even relevant, but the achievement would be owed to everything in the book that is not the baby and not the dog. The reward of so much subjectivity in a novel is owed in the end to its incompleteness, so that we may identify the familiar world that is being illuminated in an unfamiliar way. A novel about spiritual claustrophobia must not be spiritually claustrophobic itself. We may recognize something of ourselves in Will Heller, but there is much in us that he would not recognize: ordinary empathy, the struggle to live a moral life, decision-making, responsibility, duty, honor, courage, cowardice. Will can barely keep his head above water—not drowning is his only concern. So *Lowboy*, for all its power, does not linger long in the mind, because once the book ends we are returned to the endlessly more important puzzle of how its singular perspective fits into a life lived above the subway, at ground level, where the real engagements and the common obligations take place.

Wray explores a great and genuine problem in *Lowboy*, the near-insurmountable difficulty of communicating successfully with another—a problem particularly suited to redress in the act of writing a novel—and then stoutly refuses to tackle the problem himself. Communication in its myriad forms—sex, casual conversation, love—is dealt a near-fatal blow in *Lowboy*. What if one's own mind is the only thing that never fades into the background? How can one know another human being, and how can one be known, when one is imprisoned in the solitariness of sealed-away reflection? (Will at one point describes the object of his affections as "a little round house without any openings.") The fear that there may be no answer, that we may in the end be utterly alone, rattles through *Lowboy*; but this is reductive, not revealing.

Mostly Will has fleeting conversations with fleeting characters—a Sikh, a

Walker Evans, *Boy on Subway*, 1941

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tunnel-dwelling crack-addict, a prostitute named Secretary—in the course of his underground adventure. And the adventure, the entire novel, takes place over the course of a single day: November 11, 2008. This is the book's other large conceit. Wray splits his story into two, with Will on one side, and Will's mother, Violet, and a detective, Ali Lateef, on the other, searching for Will in the maelstrom of New York City. The novel itself resembles a subway car as it hurtles forward, circumscribed in its scope, with no detours and only a few stops. It starts in the morning and ends at night, while the experience inside is perfectly still, profound but uneventful, and stuck in Will's swirling observations. And Will has a calling, an obsession: global warming has cooked the world and it will end that very afternoon in a ball of fire, unless Will can cool himself down (the world is inside him, too). He can accomplish this cooling by having sex. A "prisoner of [his] own brainpan," Will frames his mission in this way: "to break the membrane that had held him all his life, to slip out into the putrefying world. He had to put himself in another body."

You wish him well in his search for sex, this boy who thinks too much. But it is quickly apparent that Will faces an uphill battle to intercourse. When a girl smiles from across the car, Will tries to smile back. "He kept his eyes wide open and made sure to show her his teeth. The strangeness of what he was attempting made the roof of his mouth go numb.... Lowboy waved at the girl and opened his eyes wider and pointed at his mouth." Sex seems to offer a momentary escape from his "brainpan," the chance to celebrate in abandon the aspect of life that is the "putrefying world." But to reach his aim Will has to rely on words, which forge the unavoidable yet untrustworthy bridge between brainpan and world. In *Lowboy*, communication is darkly impossible—a source not of knowledge, but of pain. Everyone in *Lowboy* is afraid of being misheard, of sounding not like themselves. Will often finds that his voice sounds wrong, like "a broken hinge" or "a middle-aged RN." After saying something to the detective, Violet "turned her head to gauge Lateef's reaction. She was afraid that he'd have no response at all, that he'd fail to understand, that her solitude would become absolute."

The failure of hearing disintegrates the foreground and the background for Will, and returns him to where he began: to the unconquerable abyss of his own mind. He fears the moments when the "doubts" begin and the world goes "flat." On the train he wishes to explain his mission to a Sikh gentleman, but with a few stray remarks ("Why does he have to say everything twice, thought Lowboy. I'm not deaf"), the man fades into "something contrived." Will struggles to hold the Sikh in the foreground: "'It's alright, then,' [Lowboy] said cheerfully. But it wasn't alright. His voice sounded wrong to him, precious and stilted, the voice of a spoiled English lord." Will looks and sees his failure, the Sikh now "flat and pleasant and unnatural as cake." Being heard properly, then, has become paramount. Derrida once described God as the being that can never be misheard or misunderstood: a measure of the gulf between the human and the divine, and a sacralization of the ever-present fear that one's words might not be able to travel across without perversion. But in *Lowboy* this vast gulf and this constant fear has drifted downward, and fallen into the daily and profane space between ourselves and others.

Salvation, or the hope of salvation, in all of Wray's novels, comes in the form of a woman. Love, for Wray, arrives as a proper recognition, and the beloved is the person whose meaning holds across time—the person who refuses to show up as just another stranger. This is an old theme. In the *Odyssey*, Penelope stares at the man she has not seen in twenty years: "A long while she sat in silence ... numbing wonder / filled her heart as she explored his face. / One moment he seemed ... Odysseus, to the life— / The next, no, he was not the man she knew, / a huddled mass of rags was all she saw." In *The Right Hand of Sleep*, Wray closed a chapter with the whisper of Voxlauer's lover, Else: "I won't confuse you, Herr Voxlauer." In Wray's universe this is the defining profession of love, and there is nothing higher.

For Will, there is Emily. A skinny tomboy, she is an exalted high point in an otherwise low world. Their love predates the opening of *Lowboy*, it arrives as a given. Will loves Emily because, when with her, the world tends to stay righted—"with anyone else he'd have started to have his doubts." And Emily loves Will because she sees in him something worth saving. He is fallen and she is a redeemer: for all the harshness and the grunginess, Wray is a sentimental writer. In a touching scene, Emily takes Will to a thrift store to get new clothes ("You look like an usher at the Special Olympics," she tells him), and after she has outfitted Will he says, "What do I look like.... What person place or thing do I resemble." She pulls him toward the mirror, but he insists, "Tell me.... I want you to tell me." And so she does, thoroughly and simply: "You've got on sixties-style jeans with a little pair of dice on the back pocket...." Her facts, and the fact of her, banish his doubts. Will has found the mirror—Emily—whose reflection does not destroy him.

The problem with *Lowboy* is that Wray does not trust the reader not to mishear or to misconstrue, and this leaves the novel strangely thin and unaffecting. He is exasperatingly reticent, and his reticence seems finally like an attempt to control the reader, to deny the reader all that she needs to know for the purpose of a larger understanding. Too much of the world is missing from this portrait of its distortion. "Lowboy was five foot ten and weighed 150 pounds exactly. His hair was parted on the left," is the most we get above the heads of the characters themselves (although even that could be Will taking stock of himself). Wray depicts a fundamental crisis in communication, and introduces a mode of relationship that has a hope of breaching the gulf between us—and when faced with the original gap between author and reader, he does not attempt to jump it himself. Instead he relies on a single voice, and on symbols that are shallow and obvious: a boy named Will has trouble exerting exactly that; Violet works at a department store painting faces on mannequins, because sometimes real people appear fake; everyone, except for Emily, has multiple names, because another person's identity is a hard thing to pin down; Will believes the world is inside him, and (spoiler!) that world does end.

And when the world—and the novel—ends, it is hard to care too much. *Lowboy* ends as a missed connection: a romance that evaporates by the next stop, not the discovery of love. Wray seems to hope that we will spot him on the subway, and see past his mask to something insistent, something worth holding in the foreground, worth justifying. But the mooning over missed connections is finally no more than a kind of negative sentimentality about coincidence: as if finding one's Odyssean home in another person is only a matter of chance, something that can be "missed" while bending down to tie a shoelace, when surely it is a bond made also of human responsibility, an uncasual eruption of faith followed by the work of commitment that is required for a genuine recognition of another. In the former there are no stakes, and in the latter the stakes could not be higher. And so this tale of a soul for whom everything is always on the line is surprisingly weightless. Will Heller's life is hard, but John Wray's novel is not. ◆

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Washington Diarist

Dead of Exposure

The evidence that transparency is returning to Washington may be found not in its politics but in its architecture. Everywhere buildings are going up in glass. Many of these gleaming stacks of work spaces with nothing to hide, these translucent repudiations of secrecy, have not yet accepted their tenants, and so the first thing one notices about them is that their effect owes a great deal to their emptiness. There are not yet any fingerprints on the glass, none of the stains and scratches of tasks and goals. So far the structures hold only light. But the luminosity will soon be ruined by activity—by the pixellated and caffeinated sweatshops that most offices have become. And then the limitations of transparency, even its deceptions, will be made plain. The conceit of glass, after all, is that it makes the inside and the outside continuous—which is why, for example, the passage of a beam of light through a closed window became a symbol in medieval Christian art for miraculous insemination. No significant obstacles, no disruptions in kind. Glass also accords nicely with our suspicion of walls, which seem to represent only exclusion, than which there is no greater American sin. We like porous individuals and permeable societies. And of course glass is perfectly suited to our exhibitionistic temper, about which more in a moment. Glass buildings are so honest, so guileless, so welcoming. The people at their desks see the people in the street, the people in the street see the people at their desks: community!

But this is, I think, a hoax. For a start, the people at their desks have no time to look. What is sunshine compared to an email? And when we look at them from the street, in pellucid fellowship, what precisely do we see? They may be bcc'ing all sorts of villains, for all we know. We see them, but not really; they see us, but not really. And in the comedy of the afternoon light, when windows become mirrors, we all see only ourselves. (The story is told of a handsome writer who stood rapt before a glass wall at a beach house watching the sun disappear spectacularly over the Pacific, and then turned to his friends with a thoughtful smile and said: "Not bad for 46.") So it is worth pointing out that the relations of transparency and truth are complicated. Terrible things may be done in plain view, whereas good works may be accomplished behind a wall. The openness of an action is no warrant of its merit, which is why secrecy is often more trouble than it is worth. But secrecy must not be confused with privacy, which is a fundamental entitlement of self-fashioning beings. How we wish to present ourselves, when and where we wish to be seen, is as much a prerogative of our liberty as it is of our vanity. Walls protect as well as cover, and what they protect is personality, which is our birthright, the dissidence of idiosyncrasy, the cultivation of differences for which we do not owe anybody an explanation. To be constantly observed is to be depleted of one's autonomy. If you doubt this, visit the Bloomberg building in New York, a great crystalline temple of transparency and its uses, with its fish tanks strategically placed to soften the atmosphere of control with reminders of organic life but which remind a visitor of nothing so much as the situation of the people who toil in this mill of perfect visibility. The Bloomberg building is the Panopticon.

"It's given me a tool for exceptionally mindless, voyeuristic, puerile procrastination; crowd-sourced pesky problems like finding a new accountant; stoked my narcissism; warmed my heart with nostalgia; and created a euphoric, irrational, irresistible belief in the good in men's hearts among the most skeptical people I know—people who should know better." That is Vanessa Grigoriadis, in *New York* magazine, about Facebook, in another one of her fine explorations of the illusions of Internet life. Her animadversions about the Facebook ideal of the self begin with an account of the recent outrage provoked by the company's intention to use its members' content commercially. Did these innocents really expect discretion from the most formidable engine of indiscretion ever devised? Facebook is essentially a cheerful instrument of surveillance. It consists in two hundred million publicity campaigns. "I thought of my friends who had died of exposure," Nick Cave sings, "and I remembered other ones who had died from the lack of it." So it is heartening, I suppose, that some people are discovering the alienating consequences of early or excessive revelation—the dehumanization that results from "oversharing." What does it mean to know so much about someone whom you do not know at all? The problem is this. Intimacy cannot be achieved except by time. Knowledge of another individual must be gradual, or it is not knowledge at all—it is only information, which is what remains when you subtract time from knowledge. A person cannot be grasped by information. But the Internet, which reduces everything it contains to the status of information, will not tolerate any another pace. It believes above all in acceleration. And so it accelerates the experience of human encounter beyond the powers of the heart, into an impatient universe of recreational articulateness in which surfaces are advertised and trivialities are aggregated, and self-display precedes acquaintance, and strangers are "friends." It is a new kind of loneliness, defined paradoxically by the surfeit of possibility. In sum, it is a glass house, raised upon the denial that opacity is an element of dignity.

In the capital, of course, transparency is chiefly a political subject. After eight years of an administration that made reticence seem furtive and regarded privacy as a privilege only of government, some of the shutters are coming down. Not all of them, I hope: some secrets are not guilty secrets, and their disclosure would hurt good people and good plans. But the Obama administration, unlike its predecessor, does not feel best in the shadows, and the president is not a murky man. The same cannot be said of the man who built the Bloomberg building. Last year the mayor of New York proposed mandatory DNA testing of anybody arrested on any charge, and even of suspects at crime scenes. And this year he declared that inquiries into the compensation of executives of companies that are receiving public money in the bailout is "snooping around in [their] private life." So do not fall for the palaces of light. Light reveals and light conceals. What is inescapable, in Washington, is the probity of brick.

Leon Wieseltier

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